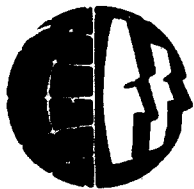


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**THE CHINESE WARLORD SYSTEM:
1916 to 1928**

by
Hsi-hseng Chi

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Figure 1. CHINA-1967

THE AUTHOR

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A substantially revised and enlarged version of this report has been submitted by the author to the University of Chicago as a doctoral dissertation.

FOREWORD

This study was conducted under a program designed to encourage university interest in basic research in social science fields related to the responsibilities of the U.S. Army. The program is conducted under contract by The American University's Center for Research in Social Systems (CRESS), and CRESS in turn has entered into subcontracts supporting basic research in a number of major universities having a marked interest in one or more of these research fields.

The research program was formulated by CRESS in terms of broad subject areas within which research would be supported, with the scholars themselves selecting specific topics and research design and utilizing information normally available to academic and private individuals. Under the terms of the subcontract the authors are free to publish independently the results of such research.

In this study Hsi-sheng Chi describes the military aspects of the political contest for control of the central government in the context of the disorganized sociopolitical structure of China from 1916 to 1928. It was prepared at the University of Chicago's Center for Social Organization Studies under the supervision of Professor Morris Janowitz, principal social scientist for research conducted under subcontract between CRESS and the university.

The report is a useful corrective to the popular image of the Chinese warlords during this period of their greatest activity. The study points out that the warlords were not merely military men exploiting China's condition for private gain in their various domains, nor were they seeking to destroy or replace the central government in the classic pattern under which many Chinese dynasties have historically emerged.

To keep his study focused on the theme of the warlord system, the author chose not to deal with the activities of the incipient Chinese Communist Party during the 1916-1928 period.

SUMMARY

A new cycle in the military and political history of China began in the early part of the twentieth century, and the author of this study traces its historical trends and outlines the political background for that period which led to the rise of the warlords and their attempts to destroy the then existing government of China.

The study of the Chinese warlord system here presented covers the period 1911 to 1928, beginning with the downfall of the Ch'ing dynasty and the establishment of the republic and concluding with the Northern Expedition of the Kuomintang (KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek.

The emperor's position in 1911 was ambiguous. While theoretically he was simply a citizen, actually he exercised some of the authority usually accorded a sovereign. The country was being threatened with civil war, but the revolutionary armies suffered a severe setback after the death of Gen. Wu Chen-lu. Yuan Shih-k'ai became president of the new republic and on him hinged the balance of power; instead of remaining loyal to the emperor he leaned toward the revolutionaries and the emperor was compelled to abdicate without force.

From 1912 to 1916, the author points out, the absence of constitutional reform, the lack of a liberal political tradition, the prevalence of strong monarchist sentiments, and an unfamiliarity with Western political thought and practice contributed to the political disruption and economic imbalance which weakened and eventually destroyed the imperial structure.

The already marked cleavage between North and South became more serious because of the contest over a constitution. The country was in turmoil and provided the climate in which the warlords became dominant, and out of this increase in their military and political influence grew the warlord system, composed of warlords and groups of warlords. Each group was named for the province from which its military leader came. The military activities of six of these groups plus those of the Kuominchün* and the Kuomintang† are divided into three phases and are described in detail. The first phase of warlord dominance lasted from 1916 to 1920.

The warlord system entered its second phase in 1920. The geographical location and the distribution of power among the different factions continued to undergo change and to effect new geographical, political, and military alignments. The system lacked an ideology—with its cohesive force—and a territorial base, which contributed to the fluidity of alignments. Because under these conditions the warlords could make no firm and lasting commitments either to strong political or territorial alliances, the power of the northern warlords was somewhat weakened.

* Kuominchün is known also as the Nationalist Army, i. e., the Army of the Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party. It should not be confused with the kuo fang chün (National Defense Army) mentioned in the second paragraph on page 29.

† Kuomintang is known variously as National People's Party, People's Party, Nationalist People's Party, Nationalist Party, and KMT.

The third phase of the system, beginning in 1924, saw the rise of the Kuominchün and also the emergence of the Kuomintang—through party reorganization and military reform—as a major force. The warlords had chosen to ignore the KMT; they could not coexist. The unsoundness of their economic practices—unsystematic and oppressive taxes, currency manipulation, concentration on solely military objectives—further weakened the warlords, and the Northern Expedition of Chiang Kai-shek's forces put an end to their dominance. However, vestiges of their influence were evident for some time after the establishment of the Nationalist Government.

The author discusses the reasons for the failure of the warlords. He examines their organizational patterns; their personal, geographic, and institutional alignments; their influence on the economy of the country through taxes and currency manipulation; and their political and economic goals and the means they used to obtain them. He concludes his study with a recommendation for further study of the post-1928 period, which he feels would yield much toward an understanding of the modernizing process going on in China. He questions why the Communists were able to overcome the warlords and why the KMT could not. The Communists have opened up new paths for China; but, the author asks, are these paths rational? The study suggested by the author could contribute substantially to a clarification of these questions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

As a people, the Chinese have a very strong sense of history. They have a better claim in this respect than most other peoples in the world because they are more favorably endowed in at least one very important particular—they have a continuous record of more than 2,500 years of history, which provides an enormous storehouse from which to draw insights and to formulate hypotheses and to put them to the test. Deeply ingrained in the Chinese mind is a concept of the historical development of Chinese civilization. This concept, put in its simplest form, runs like this: "The land under Heaven will disintegrate after long periods of integration, and will reintegrate after long periods of disintegration." It is important to note that the Chinese do not view this alternation of integration and disintegration as one of the patterns of history; they are deeply convinced that it is the only pattern, at least so far as Chinese history is concerned, and they can always look back into the vast expanse of their past and cite numerous instances to prove their point. Starting from the Chou (c. 1122-256 B. C.), the Ch'in (221-206 B. C.), and the Han (202 B. C. -221 A. D.) down to the Ch'ing (1644-1912 A. D.) dynasties, each of them represented a high point of integration and each of them was followed by an interregnum in which many forces were turned loose to compete with each other until some strong power emerged that cleared up the chaos and established a new dynasty upon the ruins of the old. The theory of alternating integration and disintegration, a form of historical determinism, does not allow for the possibility of a permanent disintegration of the nation into several small but independent entities. The cause of the disintegration of each dynasty might range from internal corrosion to external aggression, yet the conviction about the certainty of eventual reintegration seldom wavers. What is probably singularly interesting and also significant in the case of China is that the theory is more than a scholarly interpretation; it is a popularly held philosophical view. Here lies the fundamental difference between Chinese and Western views. In China, it has long ceased to be merely the theory of one among many schools of historical thought; it has acquired the status of a national consensus for both scholars and laymen and has become a view above question. When all the people believe that this is not only the way that history develops but also that it is the only way that history must develop, their conviction and their behavior, guided by this conviction, are probably helping to build up a self-fulfilling prophecy, because they refuse to see other alternatives and are determined to prove they are right. In this sense, the Chinese view has become something more than a theory about history. It has become a historical objective which is not to be passively accepted but to be actively pursued by all people.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a new cycle of historical development unfolded. The overthrow of the Ch'ing dynasty and the founding of the first republican government in Chinese history provided the stage. Although the break from the past brought about by the republican revolution was enormous, the transfer of authority was exceedingly smooth and was carried out with little bloodshed. In comparison with other dynastic changes, this recent one was strikingly mild and peaceful. The possibility of civil war loomed large for a while, but when Gen. Wu Chen-lu was assassinated, the revolutionary armies of the various provinces

which had declared independence suffered a severe blow. These armies were not superior to their Ch'ing counterparts, and it was very doubtful whether they really had much chance of winning in case of a showdown. The whole balance of power seemed to hinge on the person of Yüan Shih-k'ai. If he had decided to remain loyal to the emperor, the cause of the revolution might have been thwarted, at least for the time being. Yet when, by a change of heart, he leaned toward the revolutionary armies, the emperor was compelled to abdicate without a show of force. Looking at the revolution from this perspective, it was really not much more than a palace coup—the betrayal of the emperor's confidence by his most powerful subordinate. It was not accompanied by the usual confusion and disintegration. In fact, at least at the beginning of the new regime, the country seemed more integrated as a result of the change of authority.

However, the first five or six years after the abdication was the period of deceptive calm that precedes a hurricane, for we soon find the country plunged into disintegration in 1916, when the warlords became dominant in Chinese politics. By 1928, their force had lost potency, and the country was reunified under the Kuomintang (KMT) (Nationalist People's Party). However, one who prefers to take a longer view of Chinese politics is likely to argue that the latest cycle of disintegration and reintegration in fact took a much longer time. He may argue that the integration achieved by the KMT with the conclusion of the Northern Expedition in 1928 was incomplete, and the regime that the KMT subsequently established was, at most, different from the warlord regimes only in degree and not in kind. For one thing, the KMT did not succeed in conquering Manchuria, which stayed out of its jurisdiction for a long time. When Manchuria finally assented to rejoin the government, it was soon invaded by Japan. Probably the more fundamental argument is that the KMT was a regime established on terms acceptable to most warlords and was constrained to continue its existence to satisfy these terms. In other words, the KMT government was the consequence of a war conducted by one group of warlords against another such group. Only some weaker warlords were eliminated while others remained.

Although the KMT represented and espoused a kind of political organization which was intrinsically different from the warlord rule, the practical necessity of its reliance upon various local warlords forced it to make concessions to them which severely eroded its power position and hampered its existence. Vestiges of warlordism were conspicuous throughout the whole republican period down to the downfall of the KMT government on the mainland. It was the Communist takeover which completely wiped out warlordism and started its own rule with a clean slate. In this sense, it was the Communists who truly can be said to have successfully reintegrated the country in 1949-50, and the main explanation of their success was that they fully recognized the weakness of the KMT regime and decided to take a completely different tack. Put differently, the single most outstanding feature of the period of disintegration between 1916 and 1950 was the prevalence of warlordism. The end of disintegration came only when the last vestiges of warlordism were totally eradicated.

It is to the period 1912-16 that we must turn to find the causes which led to later disruption, however. Many of these causes had long existed and grown within the imperial structure, but their effects became apparent only during the republican period. A further practical consideration of manageability has led the author to end his study at the successful conclusion of the Northern Expedition of 1928, rather than later. The second part of this study attempts to demonstrate that the period between 1916 and 1928 does contain some characteristics which not only justify, but require, separate treatment because of its marked difference from the succeeding period.

POLITICAL COMMUNITY

Historically, the Chinese have always considered themselves as constituting a single distinct cultural and political entity. In the past, this sense of cultural distinctiveness was buttressed by the existence of other cultural groups on the fringes of Chinese territory. (The notion of the "Middle Kingdom" surrounded by barbarians or semibarbarians was deeply embedded in Chinese thinking.) Chinese history is replete with instances of the assimilation of other ethnic groups, but once assimilated, these groups were all considered Chinese. Therefore, the definition of being a Chinese had less of an ethnic and more of a cultural connotation, and the definition was a flexible one, constantly changing and growing with the addition of each new ethnic group. A barbarian remained a barbarian not because he had barbarian blood, but because he was unable to adapt to the typical Chinese way of living. Once he was culturally blended with the main body of Chinese, his blood ceased to be a matter of interest. Therefore, the sentiment of belonging to a common political community was a deep-rooted one, and it never occurred to the overwhelming majority of Chinese that such a political community might break up. This community sentiment was as strong and unswerving as ever at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, China has become increasingly exposed to a totally different type of culture, which was not only superior in certain respects but was also able to back its cultural advances with military might. Starting with the forceful opening of the treaty ports, China had suffered a succession of humiliations at the hands of almost every imperial Western power. The presence of foreign troops, the dumping of foreign merchandise, the proselytizing by foreign missionaries and their impetuous hostility towards certain aspects of the Chinese life and customs and, finally, the imposition of heavy taxes to meet indemnities, all served to accentuate the spiritual damage to China's self-image. China's humiliating experiences reached a culmination when it was roundly defeated in 1895 by Japan, hitherto considered a cultural protégé of China. This made it mercilessly apparent that China was alone in its predicament and must struggle hard for its national survival. The imposing postures of Japan and imperial Russia, the loss of previous protectorates to England and France, and finally the invasion of China proper by troops of distinctly different races uprooted whatever "cosmopolitanism" there had been in China and made the Chinese feel an increased affinity in their common plight. In this sense, the existence of external danger greatly clarified the definition of the political community. Those who felt the danger also felt the need to work together and consolidate the basis of their political community.

As a result, xenophobia developed. The world was dichotomized into Chinese and non-Chinese. All foreigners, regardless of nationality, were viewed as evil. Xenophobia reached its zenith when the Boxer Rebellion broke out in 1900 with the tacit encouragement of the court and a large segment of the intelligentsia. The Boxers attacked all things foreign, although they were by no means representative of the excellence of Chinese culture. It is also significant to note that in the wake of joint intervention by several foreign powers, the empress dowager declared war not merely against those particular powers, but against all the foreign powers represented in China—probably a unique phenomenon in world history.¹ Incidentally, it was only after the Ch'ing dynasty had repeatedly shown its incompetence in warding off foreign encroachments that the revolutionary movement gathered momentum and advocated the overthrow of the empire. All these events bear unmistakable evidence that the sense of political community was enhanced rather than diminished toward the end of the empire, and the success of the revolution must be taken as a proof of the strength of the effort to preserve and consolidate the political community through revised institutional means.

To abate the revolutionary tide, the court in 1905 dispatched two official missions to study constitutionalism in the United States and Europe. In the report submitted by these missions,

we find that republicanism such as that prevailing in the United States was rejected as impractical. The officials had as their first task the preservation of the monarchical system, therefore constitutional monarchy was the only form acceptable for China. Although their report put much stress on reserving a large area for the exercise of the emperor's royal prerogatives, this was the first time that the enactment of a constitution and the broadening of popular participation in politics were formally recommended.² Before these recommendations had a chance to be carried out, the revolution broke out in 1911 and the republic was founded.

Looking back at this period, we must say that constitutionalism had a very short history in China, with inadequate discussion and little preparation before the founding of the republic. Less than two decades had elapsed between first thoughts concerning the need for constitutionalism and the establishment of a new regime. Such inadequacy could not be fully understood without taking a look at the Chinese heritage.

Despite the chauvinistic attempts of some Chinese scholars to search the classics to find a Chinese origin for every Western idea and discovery, it must be conceded that Western political thought has followed lines of development completely divergent from its Chinese counterpart. In general, it is fair to say that Chinese political philosophy had been confined within the boundary set down by Confucius more than two thousand years ago. Political concepts such as democracy, individual rights, representative government, and constitutionalism, which had been in the mainstream of Western political thinking for centuries, were peculiarly missing from Chinese thinking. The image of the monarch as the powerful Son of Heaven was firmly rooted in the Chinese mind. The people owed unquestioning allegiance to the monarch, while the monarch bestowed personal benevolence upon them. The monarch supposedly had a moral obligation to take good care of the people and could not be removed from office by institutional means. Violence was resorted to from time to time to effect political change, but its use was severely condemned. Even toward the end of the Ch'ing dynasty, this was the view which dominated the thinking of the majority of Chinese people.

The paucity of indigenous political concepts was complicated by the lack of intellectual stimulus from foreign sources. Although the systematic translation of Western books under government supervision was conducted very early, emphasis was placed almost exclusively upon technological works. Scant attention was given to books on Western political theories and practices, due largely to the belief that the Confucian political ideal of "cosmopolitanism" had exhausted the wisdom in that field. So far, the present writer has not been able to ascertain the dates when works of such significant Western political theorists as Aristotle, J. S. Mill, Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau, and others were translated into Chinese. The author's guess is that most of them were translated into Chinese at a fairly late date, probably not until early in the twentieth century, or even after the founding of the republic. Even assuming that they were first introduced in the latter part of the nineteenth century (since those who knew some Western languages might have come into contact with these writers), it is still true that they had a very small audience, and some of the most fundamental problems in Western political thinking were unfamiliar to even the most educated Chinese intellectuals and political leaders. If democracy is taken as something more than a particular arrangement of political institutions—more fundamentally as involving a way of life—the Chinese in 1911 were unprepared for it. The republic was established; a totally different form of governmental administration was substituted for the old imperial structure; but people at large were left in utter confusion with respect to the new political values and principles which were supposedly embodied in the new regime. People had been so long accustomed to thinking in terms of absolute obedience to the emperor that they did not know what to do to adjust to the new political creed of freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty. Subjects overnight were converted into masters of the country. Government officials who had previously been regarded with respect by the people

were now said to be public servants. What did freedom mean? The right to do whatever one felt inclined to do? What, then, was the position of law?

Questions which had long been settled in other Western democracies now confronted a confused Chinese people who were desperate for some kind of political clarification and instruction. Many intellectual as well as political leaders saw this grave situation and tried to perform the function of public education. By and large, their efforts only helped to complicate the situation. Without profound understanding and long meditation, many of them eagerly put forward particular Western ideas that happened to attract their attention. For instance, Sun Yat-sen interpreted political freedom not as freedom for the individual but as freedom for the nation.³ Other brands of ideology such as communism and anarchism had their disciples, too. There were also the Confucian fundamentalists who still insisted that traditional political values should be preserved under the cloak of republicanism. Finally, there were the dyed-in-the-wool monarchists who made up a powerful minority. The multifariousness of contending and often irreconcilable schools of thought ripped the intellectuals apart and made any kind of consensus impossible. The republic under these circumstances was under great strain. The fragility of the republican values and principles was most glaringly exposed by the monarchist revivals.

MONARCHIST MOVEMENTS

Several things about the monarchist movement warrant special attention. First, although the dynasty was overthrown, the Ch'ing court was permitted to continue to occupy the palace and exercise jurisdiction within that area. The status of the emperor was somewhat ambiguous. Theoretically, he should stand on equal footing with all other people as citizens of the republic. In practice, however, a great deal of deference was paid him and he was treated as the sovereign of a foreign state. He continued to bestow imperial official titles on his favorites. Court etiquette was strictly observed. Even republican officials deemed it a great honor to have an audience with the emperor and gladly followed the court etiquette. On holidays or other important occasions, the president of the republic and the emperor would exchange messages, as heads of independent states would do.⁴ Loyalists still believed that republicanism was a temporary phenomenon, that when people got tired of novelty and disorder they would turn to the emperor for guidance. These concessions made to the defunct empire reflected in no small way the mentality of those republican officials responsible for making them. It betrayed their vacillation between the imperial heritage and the new republicanism. They held high republican offices not because of their unswerving intellectual and moral commitment to the new political values and principles but rather because of a combination of necessity and their desire for personal power. When high officials were so inefficient, it was difficult for the general population to have clear ideas of what the whole regime was about.

In the first six years of the republic, there were two monarchist movements which were reflective of the support given by the officials to the new regime. The first one was engineered by none other than the president of the republic—the supreme defender of the new order—Yüan Shih-k'ai. Although his miscalculation of the sentiments of the intellectual and some of the military (mostly KMT-influenced areas) circles led the movement to end in fiasco, the extent to which Yüan was able to influence public opinion and to manipulate a large majority of votes in favor of his enthronement was highly indicative of the weak attachment to republicanism among the provincial officials and the lack of concern by the people. Being such an adroit politician all his life, Yüan must have had some reasonable basis for believing that he could do away with the republican regime with impunity before he made his move. Incidentally, it is significant to remember that Yüan's assessment was somewhat supported by

his American constitutional advisor. In a famous article published before the monarchist movement was in full swing, Dr. Frank J. Goodnow argued that the republican form of government was ill-suited to China at this stage. He laid stress on high literacy, popularization of participation in politics, and the inculcation of democratic habits of life as preconditions for the success of republican government, all of which he found lacking in China.⁵ His discussion represented his personal evaluation of the weakness of the republican government at that time, but in general it agreed with our findings in the previous pages.

The second monarchist attempt came right at the heel of Yüan's failure and death. When summoned to Peking to mediate a dispute between the president and the prime minister, Gen. Chang Hsün masterminded the second revivalist coup in July 1917. A prominent military leader in the republican government and entrusted with great responsibility, Chang had openly expressed his loyalty to the old regime. In defiance of government order, he insisted that his men keep their queues and other imperial symbols. A few days after he went to the capital, the empire was restored. Overnight, the imperial dragon flags were flying at most public places, commercial sections, and residential areas. Effort was made to win over the support of republican officials by giving them imperial titles and honors and more than a few of them responded enthusiastically by accepting them. For a few days it looked as if the old days were back again and many people were apparently exuberant about it.⁶

Subsequently, the coup failed when it was opposed by Tuan Ch'i-jui. After he had escaped into the international settlement, General Chang claimed that he had been betrayed, because those who had signed their pledges to support the restoration later turned against him, and he threatened to make a public exposure of the whole incident and of those involved.⁷ Although the exposure was never made, the fact that Chang had taken only about one-fourth of his force along to the capital seems to suggest that he had some reason to feel confident that the coup was going to be a smooth one.

The truth about these matters may remain unknown forever. What is important to note is that even after the republic was established, the possibility of a monarchical restoration was always imminent, and twice the threat came from high officials of the new regime.

To sum up: the belated attention given to the question of constitutional, as distinct from administrative, reforms; the lack of an indigenous liberal political tradition; the unfamiliarity with Western political ideas and their practical implications; and, finally, the strong monarchist sentiments, all combined to prevent a consensus on the values and principles upon which the new regime was supposed to be based. Such absence of consensus greatly exacerbated the existing cleavages in society, for every difference of opinion emphasized the difficulties in defining the new social and political order. For those involved, it only added to the vehemence with which they waged their ideological warfare. They were unable to pool their strength and work together to achieve common goals, because these goals were, as yet, undetermined. In this sense, the struggles were most fundamental, and a political system could not expect to avoid disintegration if these conditions persisted over a long period of time. In China, the failure to resolve these first-order problems put an enormous strain on the regime and accelerated its disintegration.

STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT, 1912-16

The details of the republican form of government were provided for in the 1912 Provisional Fundamental Law which, according to current understanding, prescribed a parliamentary government with the president as a figurehead. The prime minister and other ministers were

required to countersign any decree issued in the president's name. They were also required to answer questions in parliament and to resign if impeached. The Provisional Fundamental Law prescribed a unicameral system, the Senate, whose members were elected from the local districts. It further stipulated that it would remain in effect until a full-dressed bicameral parliament was called. The parliament would be given the responsibility to draft a permanent constitution. According to Li Chien-ming, the Provisional Fundamental Law as it was finally passed was designed to curb Yüan's power.⁸ In its initial stage of consideration, the law prescribed a presidential system. This was interpreted as a countermeasure against Sung Chiao-jen who advocated a parliamentary system and who was generally regarded as an ambitious party functionary who might one day occupy the prime ministership.

However, when it became apparent that Sun Yat-sen was definitely going to resign the presidency in favor of Yüan, a few revisions were hastily made, among which the most significant was the change from a presidential system to a parliamentary system, in the hope that the prime minister might function as a check on Yüan.

This demonstrated the whimsicality with which members of the drafting convention approached the problem of the fundamental structure of the republic. Little thought was given to the long-term need of the country or the social and political conditions of the people. Since these men were mostly KMT members, partisan sentiments dominated their consideration. A convention, hastily assembled, inadequately prepared for its task, and composed of members whose partisan views and personal predilections dictated their decisions, could hardly be expected to produce a wise and practical instrument. In a word, the structure of the regime was handicapped from its inception.

No sooner had the Provisional Fundamental Law been put into effect than a dispute over its basic principle broke out. In March 1912 Yüan nominated Tang Shao-yi to head the first cabinet, possibly in the hope that their previous personal relationship would facilitate close official cooperation. Once Tang assumed his post, it became quite clear that he was determined to abide by the parliamentary system.

Friction developed when Tang and his colleagues refused to countersign some of Yüan's proposed decrees. On his part, Yüan was equally determined to convert the republic into a presidential system so that power could be concentrated in his hands. The occasion for an open breach was finally provided when Yüan issued an executive order without the knowledge of the cabinet. The upshot was the resignation of the prime minister with his cabinet. The first republican cabinet lasted barely three months. The second prime minister (Lu Cheng-hsiang) stayed in office for less than a month and was succeeded by a third, who was one of Yüan's most trusted lieutenants (Chao Ping-chün). By this time the cabinet meetings were being held inside the presidential mansion under the eyes of Yüan and the parliamentary system was in fact, if not in name, already replaced by the presidential system.

In April 1913, the first full parliament was convened. At the same time, the provisional Senate was dissolved. The first task of this new parliament was to draft a permanent constitution so that a presidential election could be held, and presidential powers accordingly defined. But Yüan succeeded in pressuring the parliament to reverse the procedure and to elect him president before drafting the constitution. After he was elected, he again blocked the parliament's attempt to draft the constitution by stripping the KMT members of their parliamentary status. In the meantime, he took steps to dictate the contents of the new constitution by pointing out that all laws must be promulgated by the president before becoming effective, and that he would not affix his signature to a constitution not acceptable to him.⁹

In January 1914, Yüan proceeded to suspend the whole parliament on the pretext that it did not possess a quorum after the exclusion of the KMT members. In the next two months, orders were issued to disband other provincial and local representative assemblies. In the meantime, another assembly was convened to draft a constitution which was tailored to the needs of Yüan and was promulgated in May 1914. In this revised Fundamental Law, the presidential system was finally affirmed. In December 1914, the tenure of president was extended to ten years with indefinite reeligibility. This made Yüan a virtual republican monarch. However, he was not satisfied. In August 1915, his personal propaganda branch was set up to espouse the change of regime back to the monarchical system and, in December of the same year, Yüan proclaimed that he would accede to popular request to become emperor. In March 1916 Yüan renounced his throne under pressure, but resumed his presidency. Two months later, he died.

This brief historical review makes it abundantly clear that the structure of the republican regime suffered from great instability since its beginning. The dispute over the distribution of power between the president on the one hand, and the cabinet and the parliament on the other, was a constant irritant that plagued the smooth functioning of the governmental machinery. The machinery itself had no Chinese foundation—it was borrowed wholesale from Western models. Presumably, the models of the contemporary English and French governments were finally adopted in the first Provisional Fundamental Law. The parliamentary system presupposed a party politics, and there were then two major parties, the Kuomintang, and the Progressive Party. The latter was an alliance of three minor parties. If parliamentary politics were to be carried out in conformity with British or French models, however, it was logical that the two major parties should offer the people a choice concerning which party they wanted to put into power and to head the government.

It was also logical that the majority party should have the right to compose the cabinet. This, however, was not the case in China. If we take a look at the first six prime ministers before the death of Yüan, we find that none of them was a party man. All of them had held important positions in the late empire. By profession, one was a diplomat, three were civil officials, and two were army officers.¹⁰ Their rise to power was in no way associated with either of the two major parties, and it might even be true that they belonged to neither. Such a fact might not be anomalous in a presidential system, since in that case the cabinet members were supposed to be responsible to the president only. But in a parliamentary system, it is hard to conceive of how and where responsibilities were to be allocated, if there was a disjunction between the cabinet and the parliament. All the prime ministers were nominated on the president's initiative and passed upon by the parliament. Without a competitive partisan spirit, the president was always able to nominate persons that he felt he could dominate, thus turning the Provisional Fundamental Law into sanctioning a presidential system. Another loophole of the law was its provision that every ministerial nominee had to secure the confirmation of the parliament separately. This provision made collective responsibility impossible. Instead, each minister was individually responsible to the parliament. This removed one of the main incentives for close cooperation and compromise within the cabinet. Integrated policy became difficult to obtain, its implementation more so.

The structural seed of division within the cabinet was aggravated by the practice of including leaders from different parties in the same cabinet. Although no party leaders ever served as prime ministers, they were usually invited to serve as heads of other ministries. This may have avoided some of the obstacles in the confirmation of all the ministers, but it also helped increase the internal division within the cabinet and made the question of responsibility even more equivocal. Still another factor which greatly impeded the structure was the frequency with which cabinet changes took place. Between March 1912 and May 1916, six prime ministers had headed the cabinet. Their average tenure was less than eight months,

the shortest being barely one month. The change of other ministers happened at an even faster pace. It would be almost impossible to expect such a system to stabilize and to evolve a kind of institutional tradition. But most important of all was the short-sightedness with which the first Provisional Fundamental Law was drafted. It was a law aimed at frustrating particular persons—first Sung Chiao-jen and then Yüan Shih-k'ai—rather than at laying a permanent institutional foundation for the generations to come. Such a law was almost bound to fail from the very beginning.

Furthermore, the republican structure suffered a severe blow when Yüan was contemplating his monarchical design. While Yüan's motives will be discussed later, it suffices to note here the irreparable damage done to the structure itself. The fact that Yüan and his cohorts could have tried to subvert the regime greatly diminished its respectability in the eyes of the people. The minor support it commanded further weakened its structural basis. The constantly turbulent state of affairs made it impossible to achieve a definition of the structure that most people could accept. Instead, its development took a most erratic course which could not fail to subject it to enormous stress. When the conditions became exacerbated, disintegration became unavoidable.

PARTY POLITICS

According to the blueprint of the republic, party politics was supposed to form the backbone of structure. Yet, the activities of the parties could not be prescribed in the constitution and had to rely on a set of tacitly agreed upon rules that commanded observance. Historically, Chinese politics was never in want of factional strife. But a political party organized for the express purpose of competing for the control of government through institutional means was something totally alien. Factions, while they always existed, were looked upon with disdain because they were primarily concerned with the acquisition and aggrandizement of personal power. On the other hand, political parties were a necessary adjunct to democracy if the people were to control the government at all. Yet, during the first years, the Chinese politicians borrowed the form of Western parties without understanding their spirit. Parties were still considered as the main instruments for the satisfaction of partisan purposes only. Behind party struggle there was no identification of the higher common good which superimposed the frame of reference within which party struggles were legitimized. That the parties were mere aggregates of politicians concerned only with their personal and partisan benefits was considered to be true not only by nonpartisan observers but also it was a sentiment shared by the partisans. In this circumstance, the traditional contempt and distaste for factional politics was applied to party politics. The negative effects created by partisan bickering and intrigues greatly diminished the prestige of parties in the regime.

WEAK INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

A more fundamental cause of the inefficiency of parties was their weak internal organization. None of the parties existed before 1912 and, therefore, none of them had developed a party tradition. The revolutionaries were organized in secret societies before the success of 1912, and were just about as inexperienced in party politics as any other party. The two major parties, the KMT and the Progressive Party, were actually composites of a number of smaller parties and factions.¹¹ Immediately after the founding of the republic, political parties proliferated. Strictly speaking, "party" was a misnomer. Most of them were parliamentary groups organized around a few notables, sometimes because of their common political views on certain issues, but more often simply because of the need to safeguard and promote

their selfish interests. Characteristically, these so-called parties had little or no formal organization and their internal composition kept changing constantly. Also, since most of them did not possess a comprehensive policy program, change of membership from one party to another and even dual or multiple membership in different parties were not uncommon.¹² Such practice was not disapproved of, because it did perform the function of adjusting short-term interests of the persons involved, and that was what justified membership in a party.

Out of these parliamentary groups emerged the two major parties. But the alliance of these groups into parties did not affect their basic structural character. Consequently, the major parties existed more in name than in fact. None of them was able to exercise stringent discipline within the party. The necessity for accommodating diverse elements within the party probably caused the major parties to tone down their party programs so that the widest support could be obtained. These programs were couched in such general terms—as national unification, good administration, local self-government, and international peace—that scarcely anyone could find any point to disagree with.¹³ By the same token, it would be hard to find any point to rally the people to the support of one party rather than another. All these programs were mere clichés which had no popular appeal.

LACK OF POPULAR BASE

Most fatal of all the weaknesses of the parties was their lack of a popular base. Since the parliamentary members were mostly local notables and politicians handpicked by the government, although sometimes through the formality of an election, the party base was in the parliament rather than in the grassroots. The absence of a campaign separated the parliamentary members from the people. It also exempted them from the trouble of organizing local electioneering boards or other means of mobilizing local support. In this way, a grassroots party failed to emerge. On the other hand, since parties had their existence only in the parliament, the parties changed with the change of membership. This, in turn, made the parties vulnerable to parliamentary changes. During the first six years, Yüan Shih-k'ai dissolved and convened several parliaments. The parties failed to perform their task of controlling the government partly because they themselves lacked organizational continuity. They possessed no weapons outside the parliament to fight with. If they had had grassroots organizations, they might have counted on gaining so many seats, no matter how frequently elections were held, so that they could at least have posed as a check on Yüan's power drive or have forced him to alter the rules of the game. The fact that Yüan did later alter those rules for the worse is beside the point here. The important thing here is that a strong party system would at least offer one more stabilizing factor to boost the viability of the regime.

Since republican politics, especially when predicated on parliamentary rule, could not be expected to work without a healthy party system, and since party politics was still a novelty in Chinese history, the parties during 1911-16 served both as pathfinders and as pace setters. They performed a dual task of borrowing from the West and innovating political forms. The lack of a profound understanding of Western party politics and the lack of an indigenous party tradition retarded the emergence of effective parties. The weakness of parties, in turn, prevented them from developing political norms which were so crucial in this transitional period. Thus, there were cabinets with a mixed composition, with the prime minister belonging to no party. The president could strip parliamentary members of their status at will; he could coerce parliamentary members into passing laws he deemed desirable; and he could dissolve and convene parliaments at his personal pleasure.

YÜAN AND COERCION

Coercion was an instrument which Yüan found convenient to use from time to time. Yüan's propensity for using force was apparent as early as 1913. In September of that year, the parliament had conceded to Yüan's request of first electing the president and then drafting the constitution. Fearing that the parliamentary members might not be so easily subdued, Yüan sent a mob of self-styled "citizens' groups" to surround the parliament and spread the word that the members would not be allowed to leave the building until they had elected a suitable president. After a day's siege, the members finally capitulated and elected Yüan president with the minimum number of required votes. Encouraged by this success, Yüan immediately took measures to disband the KMT and stripped its 438 parliamentary members of their parliamentary status. Again, the resistance was fragile. In one stroke, Yüan did away with the major party that was most likely to upset his scheme to dictate the drafting of the constitution.

There were other aspects of Yüan's use of force. Since he had effective control of most military governors and commanders in the country, he found it expedient to use them as leverage against the civilian branches of the government. In June 1912, in order to avoid the appointment of a KMT general to the post of military governor of Chihli, Yüan caused the military leaders of the province to declare their opposition to the appointment, then gave the KMT general a different and innocuous assignment, which led to the general's resignation.

This use of force soon found its second application. The next prime minister was generally considered to be a docile politician. Due to his lack of tactics, his proposed cabinet members failed to obtain the confirmation of the Senate. Again, at Yüan's instigation, various military leaders applied pressure on the senators and threatened them with dire consequences or assassination if they refused to cooperate. When a second list of cabinet members was presented, it was passed upon promptly. On July 27, four days after the confirmation of the second cabinet list, an impeachment motion against the prime minister was introduced in the Senate, whereupon the prime minister took an extended leave of absence and eventually resigned. Although Yüan had succeeded in jamming his choices of cabinet members through the Senate, the act of impeachment demonstrated that that body was far from being the completely pliable instrument that he would like it to be. To Yüan, the majority that the KMT held in the Senate was the major stumbling block to his policy, no matter how poorly organized that party really was within the Senate.

Yet, in the first parliamentary election, the KMT again obtained a majority in both houses of the new bicameral parliament. Undoubtedly, the new parliament could do a lot more to interfere with Yüan's personal programs. But for the time being Yüan was very anxious to keep the parliament going because he had yet to be formally elected as president. With his election to the presidency accomplished, Yüan promptly turned against the parliament. Before the election Yüan had persuaded the parliament to draft the provisions governing the presidential election before the main body of the constitution so that he might acquire that post without any delay. After he was elected his next step was to discover how to forestall a constitution that might restrict the exercise of presidential powers. Yet, in view of the KMT majority in both houses of the parliament, it was almost certainly to be expected that stringent restrictions would be imposed on the presidency. Therefore, for Yüan, the problem became one of how to check the KMT members.

On October 25, 1913, barely a half month after his inauguration, Yüan addressed a circular telegram to the military and civilian leaders of the provinces laying out his objections to the constitutional draft proposed by the parliament. In the telegram he placed special emphasis

on the subversive activities of many of the KMT members who were also on the special committee responsible for the drafting of a constitution, and maintained that such a constitution, if passed, would be detrimental to the national interest.¹⁴ This hint was sufficient to evoke a wave of sudden and enthusiastic responses from the military and civilian leaders. In their replies, most of them pressed for the need to dissolve the KMT, and to exclude KMT members from parliament, but few took time to dwell on the merits of the constitutional draft itself. A few days later, with the countersignature of the prime minister, the president issued an executive order to exclude 438 KMT members from the parliament. This left the parliament with less than a quorum to hold any sessions and that body was put out of business. The constitutional draft was prevented from becoming a law and the parliament was finally dissolved on January 10, 1914.

The same technique of physical coercion was used during the whole episode of monarchical restoration. Military and civilian leaders in the provinces produced many statements supporting Yüan. But now the techniques were more refined. Public opinion was fabricated to show overwhelming and spontaneous support for the new empire. All these public statements, needless to say, were dictated from one source—Yüan Shih-k'ai himself.

It is not difficult to understand why the use of coercion in this manner was Yüan's favorite political method. Because of his direction of the new army program in 1905-06, during the Ch'ing dynasty, Yüan became the spiritual as well as practical leader of the modern Chinese army. He enjoyed enormous prestige, and his power caused the court to view him with profound distrust. When the revolution broke out in 1911, the only imperial forces capable of waging, and probably of winning, the civil war were under the command of Yüan's lieutenants. In lifting the semiofficial retirement that was forced upon Yüan and delegating him with great political responsibility, the Ch'ing court was staking its last hope on Yüan that he might still be loyal to the empire. Yet, while Yüan realized that this was the supreme moment in his career to aggrandize his personal power, he was reluctant to betray the dynasty openly. To extricate himself from the dilemma, Yüan caused his subordinates who commanded troops on the front to issue a joint declaration urging the abdication of the emperor. The message was too clear to miss, and the emperor immediately decided to comply. In his abdication message, the emperor specifically provided that supreme political and military authorities would be delegated to Yüan as the head of the new republican government.

More violent means of coercion were resorted to in desperate conditions. The assassination of Sung Chiao-jen, advocate of the parliamentary system, marked a climax in the partisan struggle in the regime. Sung was regarded as a demagogue by Yüan because he posed a potent challenge to his power through institutional channels and there was little that Yüan could do to stop him. In the following June, the so-called "Second Revolution" broke out under the instigation of the KMT. Several southern provinces where the KMT had a foothold declared their opposition to Yüan and demanded his resignation. But Yüan was prepared for this event while the KMT force was hastily being drawn together. Within a month, the KMT forces were totally crushed, and the provinces fell into the hands of the Peiyang Army. From then on, the gulf between Yüan and the KMT became unbridgeable.

To sum up, the effect of regime change from monarchical to republican was enormous, and necessitated many concomitant changes in political behavior. The site of sovereignty had changed—from one residing in the monarch to one residing in the people. The nature of political authority shifted from divine trust to popular delegation. In the republic, each branch of government assumed a new stance vis-à-vis another, and each had to perform a different function from that performed under the monarchical system. Party struggle had to be legitimized and the notion of a loyal opposition had to be generally accepted. Above all, the use of

force had to be excluded from the political process in order to sustain debate and the peaceful exchange of ideas.

PERSONALITIES IN AUTHORITY

The discussion of authority can most conveniently begin with the history of the revolution. The so-called revolutionaries never had a central command of any kind. Sun Yat-sen's Hsing Chung Hui (China Renaissance Society) was but one of the many groups which tried to carry out clandestine revolutionary activities. There were many other separate groups and secret societies which also aimed at the overthrow of the Ch'ing government and which had little or no connection with each other. Many uprisings were independent actions with no overall planning. In order to evade governmental suppression, most groups had their command posts set up in Japan and worked their way into the existing secret societies and the imperial army.

Practical difficulties prevented the establishment of a single, well-organized revolutionary party. Typically, the important Wuchang uprising which led to the downfall of the empire was an isolated incident with very inadequate preparation. In a sense, the success of that particular uprising was an accident, and it is difficult to decide from hindsight whether the premature success was really a blessing to the revolutionary cause in the long run. The revolutionaries themselves were so taken by surprise by the ease with which they carried out their attack on the government that for awhile they had to look for a leader to stabilize the situation and finally had to settle for a man (Li Yüan-hung) who was not a revolutionary himself. Although the success of the Wuchang uprising was warmly responded to by revolutionaries of other places who took advantage of the confusion to declare their independence, they had little actual strength. Had it not been for Yüan Shih-k'ai's betrayal and the switch of his forces to the side of the revolutionaries, it is highly probable that these uprisings would have proven to be failures as had those of their predecessors. Even after the founding of the republic, there was no centralized revolutionary army. Instead, there were many local and autonomous revolutionary forces which were widely dispersed and appallingly disorganized. The suddenness and smoothness with which the republic came into being further removed any reason for starting a revolutionary party with its own military force. Most leaders preferred to turn their attention to the control of the government through parliamentary politics. Consequently, none of the revolutionary leaders had a steady military following. Sun Yat-sen, Huang Hsing, and Hu Han-min were neither acquainted with military affairs nor with leading military figures in the country. After Sun had resigned from his provisional presidency, his immediate interest was the reconstruction of China and the acceleration of its industrialization. Huang Hsing was more interested in party affairs and was more anxious to expand the party's membership than to refine its organization.¹⁵

In general, these two men were willing to adopt a policy of tactical retreat from national politics and leave the arena to Yüan Shih-k'ai. However, another leader, Sung Chiao-jen, took a radically different view. He conceded that the presidency should be given to Yüan, but that the cabinet must be controlled by political parties through a parliamentary majority so that a genuine parliamentary system could be implemented. In his mind, this was the best way to mix the traditional political force as personified by Yüan and the new political order as embodied in the republican regime. This was apparently a much more aggressive policy, which was aimed at restricting the powers of the president and which unavoidably incurred the wrath of Yüan. Sung's subsequent assassination was closely linked with this friction. Whatever views these different revolutionary leaders held, one thing they had in common—they all agreed on the desirability of operating within the constitutional context, and detested the use of force. They saw no need to create a separate party army or to strengthen their connections with party members who were already inside existing armies.

Yüan Shih-k'ai first started building his personal power base when he was appointed, by imperial decree on December 8, 1895, to train the new army at Tientsin. Although the increase of his power incurred the displeasure of the court, which led to his removal from his post, he was able to produce a relatively modern army and draw intense loyalty from his subordinates. By 1906, this army had grown into a big force, variously estimated at between 50,000 and 80,000 men. One thing was certain: this Peiyang Army, as it later became known, was the best fighting force the empire had, while the quality of the "banner armies" (Manchu) rapidly deteriorated. On the eve of the revolution, almost all the military units capable of fighting were under the command of Yüan's men. Thus, when 44 commanders under the leadership of Tuan Ch'i-jui declared themselves in favor of a republican and constitutional form of government, the emperor had no alternative but to abdicate. It was also the consideration of Yüan's power and the desire to avoid further civil war and bloodshed that led Sun Yat-sen to offer to resign from the provisional presidency in favor of Yüan if he was willing to declare his allegiance to the newly founded republic. In the years that followed, while the revolutionaries and other political parties were absorbed in the struggle of parliamentary politics, Yüan consistently continued to build up his personal military power. In June 1912, he first persuaded the revolutionaries to disband their motley assortment of military units. The revolutionaries readily accepted this proposal, since they saw no reason why a separate military force should exist outside the governmental structure; but once this was done, the revolutionaries would have no force of their own.

Next, Yüan tried simultaneously to prevent the assignment of revolutionary generals to strategic areas and to remove those who already had their assignments. Thus, in June 1912, he was willing to precipitate a cabinet crisis in order to prevent a revolutionary general from getting the assignment as military governor of Chihli—a province which could most easily threaten his position in the capital. Instead, Gen. Feng Kuo-chang, one of Yüan's trusted lieutenants, was given the assignment (September 1, 1912). On the other hand, early in July 1912, Yüan had felt obliged to appoint some revolutionary generals to military governorship in some southern provinces—Li Lieh-chün in Kiangsi, Po Wen-wei in Anhwei, and Hu Han-min in Kwangtung. These men were all removed after the assassination of Sung Chiao-jen, in June 1913. After the failure of the "Second Revolution," the remnants of the revolutionaries were almost all driven out of the military. Finally, Yüan took steps to increase his military power, both by expanding the existing army and by creating new units to assure absolute loyalty.

The combination of Yüan's personality and military power was an extremely important element in understanding the history of China. Yüan himself was by no means a revolutionary. Judging from his record in the late Ch'ing years, he might be categorized as a reformist who saw the need to rectify certain administrative abuses in order to strengthen the country, but in political outlook, he was mainly a conservative and a traditionalist. In terms of political skill, he was an opportunist: he had no liking for the radical proposals advanced by the revolutionaries, yet he was willing to join hands with them in order to satisfy his own personal ambition. However, such an alliance could only be temporary. The fundamental cleavage between the revolutionaries' demand for a new order and Yüan's nostalgia for old grandeur sooner or later had to head for a showdown.

Other signs suggested that the rift between Yüan and his subordinates might have existed earlier. In October 1914, Yüan had seen the need to organize a new army—the so-called "model regiment"—the members of which were selected from the existing military units. There were initially four infantry regiments, one artillery battalion, and one machinegun corps in the spring of 1915. Eventually, this new force was to be expanded to about ten divisions which would ultimately replace the existing Peiyang Army that Yüan now deemed unreliable.

and inefficient. To ensure maximum loyalty, all officers and men were required to take an oath of allegiance to Yüan personally instead of to the state. That Yüan placed great hope on this force was shown by his never-failing presence at the weekly inspection of the troops and by his delegation of the supervisory power of the troops to his own son, Yüan K'e-ting.¹⁶ In this undertaking, Yüan's motive was quite transparent. After the founding of the republic, mutinies of soldiers became quite frequent. Many of them were prompted by the internal corruption of the army, such as lack of discipline, embezzlement by the officers, inadequacy of provisions and the reduction or stoppage of salaries to the soldiers, and other genuine grievances. At other times, mutinies were manipulated by the commanding officers to increase their bargaining power against the central authority. Being a man who had acquired great fame for his love of discipline and efficiency during his training of the Peiyang Army, Yüan naturally was much distressed by the condition of the army and was anxious to reform it. A more important reason was that the existing Peiyang Army had become a stumbling block to the exercise of his political power. His orders were not always strictly followed and sometimes were even ignored.

What was more disheartening was that his former loyal subordinates already tended to view their provinces as their private domains. This created serious problems for the administration of the central government, since early in the republican era some of the military governors had either ceased to transmit or reduced the amount of funds that were due to the central government;¹⁷ thus Yüan was forced to rely increasingly on the willingness of foreign powers to extend loans. If this anomalous situation had been allowed to continue long, the government would have faced bankruptcy. This, more than a concern for efficiency, directly threatened Yüan's political life and was a matter of the utmost concern to him. To bring the matter to a peaceful solution, Yüan instituted a training program, accompanied by a different program aimed at the reorganization of the provincial governments. He began this more peaceful method by changing the title of military governor to that of "general." Then the generals were divided into two different categories with different prefixes—the "wu-generals" and the "wei-generals." The former included those who actually had provincial assignments; the latter included those without provincial assignments, but each group was expected to be qualified to replace the other. Eventually, it was expected that the military leaders would be uprooted from their respective territorial bases and become wholly dependent upon appointment by the central government.¹⁸

To carry this reorganization policy a step further, Yüan also appointed civil governors who had equal standing with the military governors, but whose main responsibility was the administration of civil affairs. By stressing the demarcation of spheres of responsibilities, it was hoped that the all-inclusive authority of the military governors would be curtailed. Yet, these programs met with strong resistance from the entrenched military leaders and only helped to further alienate some of them from Yüan's circle. In the end, the reorganization achieved very little tangible effect, for Yüan could apply it only to those without military power while his real enemies went through it unscathed.

Other unwise measures also contributed to estrange some of Yüan's most powerful lieutenants. The dismissal of Tuan Ch'i-jui in August from the Ministry of the Army for his incompetent performance in the bandit (White-Wolf) suppression campaign must have angered the following of that powerful general. In addition, Yüan's concealment from Feng Kuo-chang of his monarchical ambition must also have aroused the latter's suspicion. The lukewarm attitude of these men in the critical days of Yüan's monarchical movement did a lot to undermine it and cause it to fail.

But Yüan was not without support within the military camp. After the uprising of Yunnan, Yüan was able to dispatch to the troubled area a large expeditionary force which scored a

number of victories and regained some lost territories. Even as late as mid-May 1916, when the whole monarchical fiasco was drawing to a close, and when Yüan's prestige was at its lowest point, the Nanking conference, which included representatives from more than a dozen provinces, was unable to adopt a unanimous position regarding his retirement. Although Feng Kuo-chang was quite willing to see Yüan resign, he felt it wise to make his position as ambiguous as possible. On the other hand, Ni Tzu-ch'ung and Chang Hsün expressed their readiness to fight for Yüan. Thus the conference reached no conclusion.¹⁹ Meanwhile, in the north, after the monarchy was officially terminated, Tuan answered the call to form a new cabinet and undertook to negotiate peace with the independent provinces. Even at this time, Yüan still could count on the support of several provinces such as Chihli, Fengtien, Honan, Shensi, and Anhwei. And even those who had from the beginning opposed the movement, such as Tuan and Feng, felt constrained to adopt passive resistance and then to help Yüan when the latter showed willingness to make major concessions. All this attested to the remaining power of Yüan, which was gravely weakened but not necessarily destroyed by the monarchical fiasco.

Looking at the monarchical movement as a whole, it is doubtful if its failure was really due to the strength of the republican opposition. It seems that the theme of the spontaneous outburst of indignation among the people was sometimes overemphasized. If we review the history of those eventful months, we find first that the disparity between the forces of the opposing sides was enormous. In the now famous Yünnan uprising, Ts'ai Ao and Tang Chi-yao started out with one province and approximately 3,000 poorly equipped and poorly supplied soldiers in the closing days of 1915.²⁰ After some initial minor victories, this force was successfully contained by Yüan's force at the border area of Szechwan and Hunan. Yünnan's sister province, Kweichow, did not proclaim independence until a month later. On Yüan's side, two divisions and three mixed brigades were engaged in the struggle and another three divisions were on their way for reinforcements. The superiority in numbers and equipment of Yüan's forces made the struggle most unequal, and a quick victory for Yünnan and Kweichow was doubtful indeed.

In these two provinces the influence of the Progressive Party prevailed. The strength of the KMT during this time was indeed meager. Ever since the failure of the so-called "Second Revolution," KMT influence was driven out of most provinces. During the antimonarchical campaign, the KMT could do no better than instigate some sporadic uprisings in widely separated localities which were soon put down by the forces loyal to Yüan. Organized KMT activities on a large scale were nonexistent. If we turn to examine the provinces which did declare their opposition to Yüan's monarchy, we find it hard to sustain the argument that they represented republican sentiments. After Kweichow another two months elapsed before the next province—Kwangsi—joined the opposition. Kwangsi's defection was the result of Yüan's attempt to replace its military governor and to force it to fight on his side.²¹

On March 22, 1916, Yüan decreed to cancel the monarchical movement. Kwangtung and Chekiang proclaimed independence in April; Szechwan and Hunan followed suit in May. It is significant to note that before March only three provinces actually took part in the fighting while the outcome was uncertain, and one of them was driven into the arms of the opposition by Yüan's own tactical blunder. The adherence to republicanism by Lu Jung-t'ing (of Kwangsi) cannot be accepted without serious reservation. The other four provinces took action only after it was quite apparent that they could reap political advantage, but incur no damage, by their belatedness. The leaders in Szechwan and Hunan—Ch'en Huan and T'ang Hsiang-ming—were Yüan's benchmen and their action must be considered as moves to preserve their personal interests rather than as devotion to the republican cause. All in all, with the exception of Yünnan and possibly Kweichow, it is difficult to believe that any of the other provinces was dead set against the monarchical system.

In the light of available information, it must be said that the failure of Yüan's movement was due largely to his lack of tactics and to the political opportunism demonstrated by his opposition. Public indignation toward his betrayal of the republican regime was strongly shared by the revolutionaries and many enlightened intellectuals. It is less certain that it was equally strongly shared by the majority of the people. It is likely that most people were indifferent or perhaps supportive. What is important is that those who did oppose the monarchy because of moral conviction had no power and those who had power did so primarily for personal reasons. Thus, the struggle of the monarchical movement was less ideological than personal. If Yüan and his regime had lasted, he might have attracted sufficient support and maintained order. Since Yüan was removed from politics by untimely death, however, the next question is: Was there anyone else to substitute for him?

Here the last hope of preventing political disintegration in China was lost. There was no one capable of fulfilling that responsibility. The man who succeeded Yüan to the presidency, Li Yüan-hung, was powerless. At the time of the revolution he was but a middle-ranking army officer reluctantly assuming leadership responsibility. During the next two years (prior to December 1913) he probably tried to build up a personal following in the province of Hupeh. Yet, when he went to Peking to take up responsibility as vice president, his province was promptly lost to Tuan Ch'i-jui and he was put under virtual house arrest.²² Since then he had remained a nominal national leader without political or military influence. When he acceded to the presidency upon Yüan's death, his lack of political acumen and independent military power made him an easy prey to contending factions among the parliament and the military. The result was that he antagonized many people and commanded the respect or obedience of none. To entrust the affairs of the state to such a man and to expect decisive leadership would be illusory.

Of the other prominent persons, only four seemed to qualify. They were Hsü Shih-ch'ang, Tuan Ch'i-jui, Feng Kuo-chang, and Wang Shih-chen. Hsü Shih-ch'ang had held high positions in the late empire, and had cooperated with Yüan on many occasions. He was the only one who had sufficient prestige to claim an equal standing with Yüan. In addition, by virtue of being a close associate of Yüan, Hsü had extensive personal connections with the important military figures of the Peiyang Army. Yet Hsü was anything but an aggressive and energetic leader. A much more serious handicap was that he was a civil official with no personal military backing. This put him in an unfavorable position vis-à-vis the other powerful figures. His presidency between October 1918 and June 1922 showed his utter impotence in dealing with the militarists of the country. At the time of Yüan's death, Hsü's position was scarcely better and assuming the leadership was out of the question for him.

The other three men had been Yüan's most trusted subordinates since the time he had undertaken to reform the imperial army. They formed the pillars upon which Yüan's personal military power was built, and they had great influence and wide acquaintance with the Peiyang militarists. Wang Shih-chen, however, had contented himself with semiretirement from public affairs after the republic was established. This left the stage to Tuan and Feng. During the first six years of the republic, Tuan's career was intermingled with politics at the national level. Except for a brief time when he superseded Li Yüan-hung as military governor of Hupeh, Tuan had been minister of war almost continuously and sometimes prime minister of Yüan's cabinet. Tuan's position was certainly elevated because of the official roles he played, and his power seemed to have extended as long as he held these roles. Yet, in the meantime, his occupation with national politics dissociated him from any particular area with which he could identify himself. So long as Yüan's authority prevailed, Tuan could use his ministerial position to deal with individual militarists and exert tremendous influence over them. But he never was able to build up a force of his own.

Unlike Tuan, Feng had been occupied with provincial politics and abstained from participating in national politics. After his appointment to the military governorship of Kiangsu, Feng gradually worked to extend his power into the neighboring province of Kiangsi and became the unofficial leader of the Yangtze Valley. His military power was unquestionably superior to that of many other militarists, but the spheres which he actually controlled nevertheless remained limited.

If we look at the situation as a whole, we are probably safe in attributing this state of affairs to Yüan Shih-k'ai's deliberate design. More than anyone else, Yüan must have been sensitive to the growth of his subordinates. With his monarchy and the succession of his son to the throne in mind, it was not altogether unlikely that Yüan had tried his best to separate Feng and Tuan. A joining of forces by these two men would have posed a grave threat not only to his posterity but to his present position, while to keep one in the central government and dispatch another to a relatively faraway area might prevent their conspiring together, and might possibly create conflict between them. If this were the case, then Yüan's design paid off handsomely for his own benefit, but very poorly for the country as a whole. For, while neither of them was capable of challenging Yüan's authority when he was alive, neither of them was capable of assuming leadership upon his death. While Tuan was anxious to vindicate national authority, Feng was inclined to protect and respect the local power base. The course that events took after Yüan's death only accentuated their differences. In the end, it was these men with their military followings that accelerated the political disintegration of China. Lack of a powerful figure, possessing both overwhelming military strength and political skill, dealt the final blow to the political integration of the Chinese republic.

Undoubtedly, the regime which was established in 1911 suffered great instability from its inception. It had never succeeded in making its political goals and principles acceptable to the majority of people, and within six years it was twice sabotaged by monarchists in high official positions, while the general population remained apathetic. With the highest principles constantly cast in doubt, and with the limited time the regime was given, a stable political structure failed to emerge. There were great fluctuations in institutional life and much political behavior remained so unpredictable that things brinked on chaos. Political order might have been salvaged, however, if Yüan Shih-k'ai had been wise and prudent in his political maneuvers. Had he lived longer, his political presence could not have failed to be an integrating force. Even with the continuing weakening of the regime and the removal of Yüan from politics, China would not have had to face political disintegration if someone else had been strong enough to consolidate the country and establish a respected and purposeful regime. Thus, the stage was set for the warlords to dominate the internal politics of China for the next decade.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHINESE WARLORD SYSTEM

Political development in China between 1916 and 1928 presents serious conceptual problems to the student approaching the subject from the viewpoint of politics within a nation-state. In both Chinese and foreign literature, historians and political scientists have been inclined to follow two approaches. The first starts from the premise that China had a stable political system. While scholars do not totally ignore the existence of the powerful warlords, they play down their significance and regard them as no more than political nuisances, engaged in intense power struggles not uncommon in other political systems. Notwithstanding the many manifestations of the warlords' political might, China is seen as undergoing a series of political crises as the result of internal struggle, and the central government is regarded as representing the sole political authority of China. Warlords are described as not more than an assortment of jealous, self-seeking, military adventurers operating within the institutional framework of a stable political structure.

A quite different approach emphasizes rather than muffles the internal division of China at that time. Some scholars are inclined to picture China as a bipolar system—a direct confrontation between the north and the south. This view was first inspired by Kuomintang propaganda and later became the official interpretation of modern Chinese history after the KMT assumed authority. Although the political and military weaknesses of the south were candidly acknowledged, its political development was given equal or more extensive coverage than that of the north. The whole period was interpreted as a political party's effort to continue the revolution in order to oust usurpers from the seat of the legitimate government. That task was accomplished when the Northern Expedition was brought to a successful conclusion in 1928 when the north capitulated.

By and large, these two approaches must both be considered unsatisfactory. The first approach (traditionalist, legalist, and institutionalist) does have undeniable value in dealing with a political system in the normal usage of the term. But in the Chinese case, it is addressing itself to the wrong object or, even worse, to a nonexistent object, for there was no such political system. To pursue such an argument is to miss the most critical point in Chinese politics. There never was an independent central government during this period if we understand central government to mean a government which stood at the apex of the power structure with the various warlords subordinated within that structure.

While the second approach indicates the internal division of the country, it nevertheless presents a distorted picture of that division and greatly inflates the significance of the role played by the south, while lumping the northern warlords together into one undifferentiated group. Actually, at that time China had a number of warlord groups of which the weaker and more insignificant were in the south. In reality China resembled an "international system" more closely than a "nation-state." To use a borrowed term, it had a "null political system."¹ If this concept is accurate, then the subject matter obviously calls for a radically different interpretation.

The author proposes to designate the present study as the "Chinese Warlord System" in order to emphasize the role of the warlords as pivotal figures in the system and to differentiate this study from previous attempts at interpreting Chinese history.

IMPLICATIONS OF FOREIGN INTERESTS

Ever since Westerners opened China's doors with gunboats and marines, it has been a gaming ground for ambitious foreign powers. The Japanese interests in Manchuria and North China, British interests in the Yangtze Valley, as well as Soviet interests in the south were all well-known facts of this period. Although most Western powers were primarily occupied with safeguarding their commercial privileges, Japan manifested the old-line imperialist policy of territorial gains, while Soviet Russia was probably more interested in spreading its ideological blessings. Whatever their political objectives, these foreign powers did not make a consistent endeavor to achieve them through the establishment of local puppet regimes. By and large, the powers continued to exact advantages from the Chinese while allowing them to mind their own internal affairs just so long as the foreign interests were not interfered with. Often a special relationship might exist between a foreign power and local Chinese authorities, the supply of arms being the most outstanding proof of that relationship. It is difficult, however, to find instances of massive foreign intervention in Chinese politics on behalf of a particular warlord. In this connection, it is helpful to look at the case of Manchuria, a region which was very much under the influence of Japanese military and economic power. Yet in the political activities of Marshal Chang Tso-lin, it is difficult to find any evidence to suggest that he was not a free agent or that he was acting under the orders of the Japanese. This can be interpreted to mean that the Japanese were not prepared to follow the policy of safeguarding or extending their interests through active intervention of Chinese internal politics.

In the south, where the Soviets had a very keen interest in participating in internal politics, their effort was largely frustrated. While the KMT was anxious to acquire military advice and material assistance, it decided to launch the Northern Expedition over strong Soviet objection.

Chinese warlords enjoyed general freedom of action to pursue political goals as they saw fit, partly due to the abstention of the foreign powers from meddling with internal politics and partly due to their own jealous protection of their initiatives. In studying the history of this period, the author acquired the strong impression that the Chinese warlords were playing a game of their own calling. While the presence of foreign powers might have affected their capabilities in some cases and somewhat constrained their deliberation, it in no way fundamentally affected the nature of the Chinese system.

GENERAL BOUNDARIES OF THE WARLORD SYSTEM

When Yuan died in 1916, he left the country in a political turmoil which soon declined into fragmentation. In the two years or so following his death, numerous warlords sprang up, often meager in influence and strength, vying for control of territories and resources. The central government under the presidency of Gen. Li Yuan-hung was rendered impotent. Some warlords were lucky enough to start their careers with a piece of territory, but few of them enjoyed effective control over an area larger than a province. Many of them were merely armed bands, held together by able leaders and dependent on plunder for their living. These warlords took orders from nobody, since the military hierarchy had already broken down. They were virtually semisovereign units.

The word "warlord" is a general term indiscriminately applied to all militarists who commanded a force from as few as a mere handful of men and some outmoded weapons to as many as several hundred thousand well-trained regular soldiers with modern equipment. Some of them were no more than drifting bandits, others controlled territories extending over several provinces. According to one estimate, the total number of warlords from 1917 to 1928 was somewhere around 2,000.² They existed in every province, north and south. Some of them worked their way up through the regular professional channels and achieved prominence among their colleagues by long years of service or outstanding combat records. Others became warlords by gathering together a group of desperate men and establishing a force outside the existing military system.

The Chinese warlord system was composed of warlords or, more accurately, groups of warlords who showed a relatively permanent attachment to some particular military organization. Each faction had some kind of hierarchy within its structure, commanded a sizable army, and controlled a piece of territory. There were eight predominant groups in the system. Since their geographical control changed as a consequence of military conflict, only the names are given here: Fengtien, Chihli, Anwei, Kuomintang (KMT), Kuominchün, Shansi, Szechwan, and Hunan.*

In deciding the boundary of the system there are two feasible alternatives. One is to regard seven of the above-mentioned (with the exception of the KMT) as constituting the system and to treat the KMT as a parametric element. Certain considerations favor this alternative. During most of the time, the KMT was somewhat neglected and had little interaction with the other groups; it was weak and was composed of diverse elements, which impeded its participation in the system. It was not until the last stage of the warlord system that the tempo of interaction between the KMT and the other groups was quickened to bring about a drastic transformation of the system. By limiting the discussion to seven groups, the analytical problem would be much simplified and we would be able to detect a highly consistent pattern of behavior. We would also have a clear picture of the mechanism of the system and could explain its demise simply as the result of the intrusion of an outside force hitherto immobilized.

Yet, this alternative is not free of shortcomings. The territory over which the KMT ruled has never been viewed as separate from China, and when the KMT is treated as an integral part of the Chinese system, instead of as an environmental element, a detailed analysis of it is justified. In many respects the KMT was different from the other groups in the warlord system—particularly in its strong ideological commitment. These differences provide us with new angles from which to examine the subject which, in turn, will enrich the content of the analysis. For these reasons, the KMT will be treated as an integral part of the system.

BACKGROUND OF THE WARLORD SYSTEM

The rise of warlordism in China is by no means accidental. During Yüan Shih-k'ai's career he consistently used his military subordinates to blackmail the imperial court and, later, his republican opponents. Those who were thus used began to have a sense of their own importance in national politics which increased their ambition for more opportunities. The death of Yüan removed the final restraints and they immediately unleashed their full force into Chinese politics.

*Fengtien, Chihli, etc. (underscored), will be used to refer to the groups (factions), while Fengtien, Chihli, etc., refer to the provinces.

In a strict sense, however, Yüan did not create warlordism. He only revived a dormant force which had its modern beginning in the late Ch'ing dynasty. Prior to the nineteenth century, military power was virtually monopolized by the Manchus. The long quiescent period and the privileged position they held probably did a lot to demoralize these hard fighters, however. The succession of foreign intrusions and domestic uprisings which followed in the mid-nineteenth century finally exposed the weakness of the imperial army. During the T'ai'ping Rebellion, the Manchu army crumbled so fast that the foundation of the empire was for awhile quite shattered. As a desperate move, the court allowed the organization of local armed bands to assume the task of suppressing the rebels.

Out of these circumstances emerged the famous Hunan Army (Hsiang-chün) under the leadership of Tseng Kuo-feng. This purely local force was first organized in 1853. Very soon it expanded into a formidable military establishment. In 1862 another local force sprang up in the province of Anwei under the leadership of Li Hung-chang. Commonly known as Huai-chün, this latter force eventually superseded the Hsiang-chün and became the bulwark of imperial defense.³ In the T'ai'ping and Nien rebellions these armies demonstrated that they were essential to the empire, and local military forces composed of Chinese finally took deep root. While the establishment of these local armies was prompted by the necessity of rescuing the imperial order from internal erosion, it nevertheless laid an important historical groundwork for warlordism in the republican period which was destructive of the political order.

BEGINNING OF THE WARLORD SYSTEM

When the affairs of the country became chaotic immediately after Yüan's death, the central government rapidly lost its grip on the nation. The cleavage between the north and the south was once again sharpened by the differences of opinion over which constitution should be followed. In his official oath administered upon his succession to the presidency, Li Yüan-hung used some highly equivocal language as to which constitution he would adhere to. Many provinces were dissatisfied and demanded a clear declaration to restore the first Provisional Fundamental Law. Also, the question of the tenure of the presidency and the advisability of convening the old parliament further complicated the issue. Tuan and his entourage favored continuing the 1914 constitution which would give more power to the executive, while the south insisted on restoring the 1912 constitution safeguarding parliamentary paramountcy. The issues were settled in favor of the south when the navy declared its support for the southern position (June 25, 1916). Following this, a new opposition began to take shape between the president and the premier. It was apparently the view of Tuan that he should be allowed to assume full governmental responsibility in his dealing with internal and external affairs and that the president should content himself with being a political figurehead. This view, however, was not shared by Li. Soon these two men were at loggerheads. Finally, the issue of declaration of war against Germany provided the occasion for an open rupture between these men and Tuan was subsequently dismissed. As a show of solidarity behind Tuan, military governors of many provinces, under the leadership of Ni Tzu-ch'ung, declared their independence of Li's central government. In a desperate move to salvage his political prestige, Li invited Chang Hsün to come to Peking as a mediator. Instead of trying to extricate the president from his predicament, Chang first pressured Li into dissolving the parliament and then declared the restoration of the Ch'ing dynasty. Li escaped to seek political asylum in the legation quarters of the capital. In the meantime, Chang's coup was swiftly suppressed, and Gen. Feng Kuo-chang was installed as the new president of the government. All these events took place in the first year following Yüan's death.

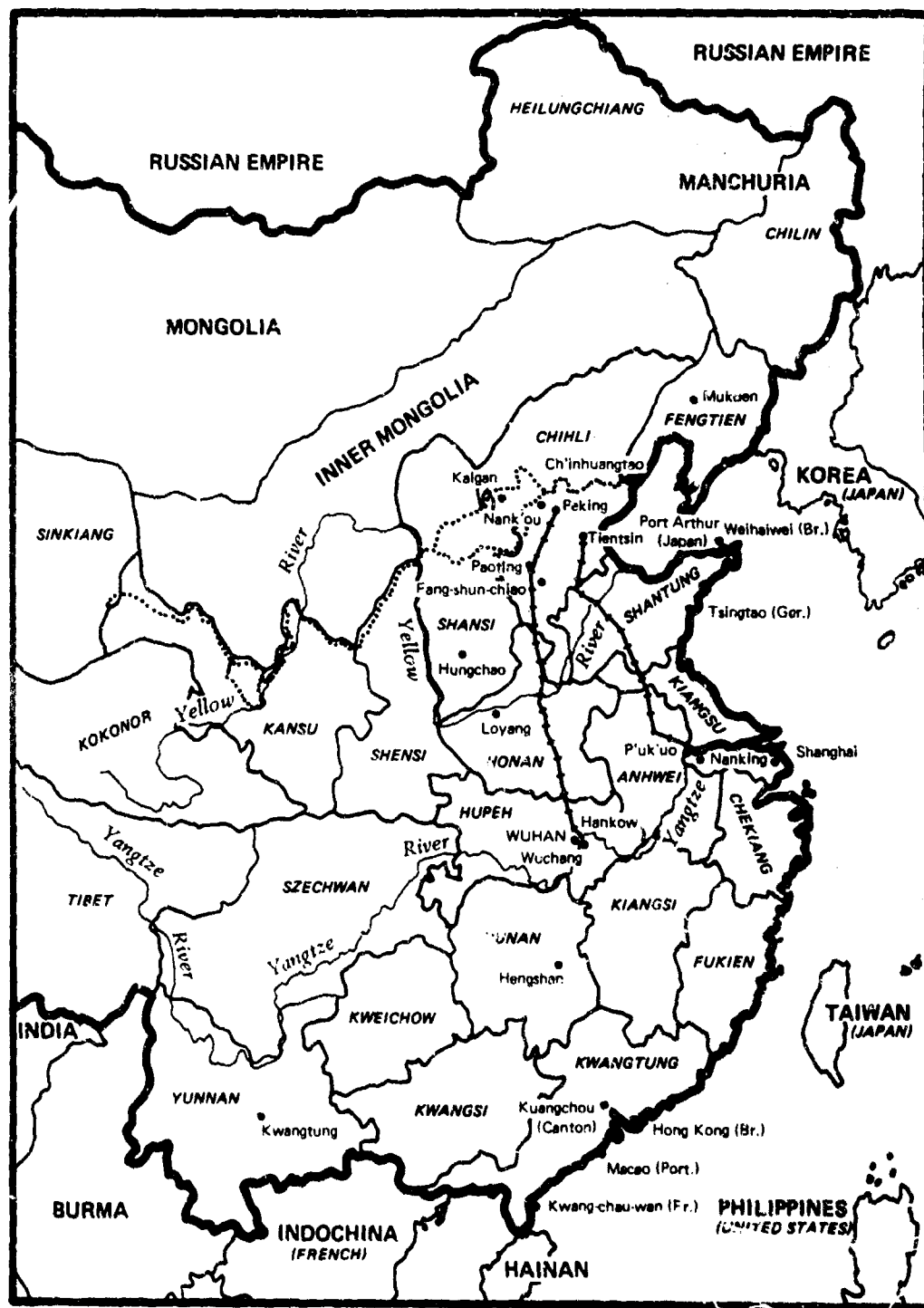


Figure 2. CHINA-1916

First or Formative Phase, 1916-20

The formative phase of the warlord system lasted from 1916 to 1920. As soon as Yuan died, the country was divided into many separate and independent or semi-independent areas, each with a warlord in authority. In the years following 1917, politics in the central government increasingly receded into the background while that of the warlords was increasing in prominence. Foremost in importance among the warlords were, of course, the various provincial military governors. These warlords not only worked hard toward achieving political autonomy in their respective provinces but also attempted to intervene actively in national politics. An association of provincial military governors was organized, which conferred occasionally to discuss what measures to take with respect to national issues. For instance, on September 25, 1916, a circular telegram was signed by 34 people, including almost all the important military governors, civil governors, and division and brigade commanders opposing the appointment of the new foreign minister by the central government.⁴

Provincial military governors seldom exercised complete control over their domains, however. There was a host of other, lesser, local warlords, division commanders, or even brigade commanders who were anxious to grab a piece of territory. With or without formal declaration, these lesser warlords were virtually independent both of the central government and of the provincial warlords. Consequently, it is almost impossible to know how many warlords did exist at one time, although it was undeniable that the country was segmented. The number of independent warlords was so numerous during the years 1916-20 that it was neither possible nor fruitful to designate the various groups.

During this phase most warlords were busy consolidating their internal structures or expanding into their immediate neighborhoods. Wars within each province or geographical region occurred constantly as the more powerful warlords tried to regroup the diverse elements in the region into larger units. Chang Tso-lin was governor of one Manchurian province and tried to establish his power in the other two, the south was in utter chaos, and Feng Kuo-chang had control over two provinces. The other warlords either controlled one province or part of a province. The only exception was Tuan Ch'i-jui. After the second monarchist coup, Tuan was appointed Prime Minister of China. One of his first acts upon assuming office was to dissolve the parliament. This was strongly opposed by the Kuomintang and the southern provinces. In July, the navy declared its opposition to the cabinet formed in the absence of the parliament and sailed out from Shanghai to Kwangtung. On September 3, 1917, the southern military government was formally proclaimed, with Sun Yat-sen as the Generalissimo.

Earlier in July of that year, Tuan made his first move to extend his control into Hunan by dispatching a northern division into that province.⁵ Tuan's selection of Hunan as his first target was by no means accidental. At this juncture it seemed that the real challenge to his policy came from the south, where the determined opposition of the KMT against Tuan was well known. On August 6, 1917, Tuan's cabinet announced the appointment of a new military governor to Hunan. The appointee, Fu Liang-tso, was a native of Hunan, but had spent most of his adult life in the north and had closer connections with the northern militarists than with his native province.⁶ Yet the fact that Fu was given the appointment showed Tuan's efforts to placate the local warlords and to conceal the significance of this act. As a further gesture of assuring the Hunanese, Fu made it known that he would not bring with him any northern troops, nor did he plan to change the internal military structure of Hunan.⁷ Yet, once he had formally taken over the office, the northern troops that had already been sent south immediately got ready to march into the province.

In the meantime, the Hunanese had not been idle. When the news of the new appointment was first announced, the incumbent governor, T'ao Yen-kai, sent a personal representative to

Peking to welcome the new appointee, while losing no time in secretly redeploying his troops within the province for a showdown.⁸ Two Hunanese warlords declared independence on the 18th of August, and war immediately broke out. Tuan's main force was composed of two northern divisions, the 8th and the 20th, which dealt some severe blows to the inferior Hunanese Army. An additional 17th Division was later thrown into the battlefield.⁹ However, internal dissension soon ripped Tuan's victorious friends apart, and in November the tide on the battlefield took a sharp turn. Several factors might have contributed to this development. In the first place, the morale of the Hunanese Army was boosted when reinforcements arrived from the southern provinces. Second, Feng Kuo-chang was probably not very pleased with Tuan's scheme and might have hinted his sentiments to the commanders of the 8th and 20th Divisions, both of whom were closer to Feng, thus causing the latter to resort to slowdown techniques in their fighting.¹⁰ Third, the commander of the 8th Division, Wang Ju-hsien, might have coveted the governorship for himself and was not anxious to keep Fu in power.¹¹ In any case, Wang Ju-hsien petitioned the central government to proclaim a cease-fire on November 6, the same day Fu was forced to flee Hunan. On the 15th of November, Ts'ao K'un, Wang Chan-yüan, Li Shun, and Chen Kuan-yüan—military governors of Chihli, Hupeh, Kiangsu, and Kiangsi, respectively—also declared themselves in favor of seeking a peaceful solution. In the meantime, Tuan not only suffered a setback in Hunan but also in Szechwan, which had been under attack by northern troops for quite some time. Facing the total bankruptcy of his first major military adventure, Tuan felt obliged to resign his premiership. But his eclipse from politics was not to be for long, for in December, Tuan was appointed to head the newly established Bureau of War Participation, ostensibly to supervise the preparations for China's eventual participation in the European war. Three months later, on March 23, 1918, Tuan was back in the premier's office. During this interval a train of events had taken place that changed completely the atmosphere which had been unfavorable to Tuan's military policy.

Among the governors who favored a peaceful solution, Ts'ao K'un and Wang Chan-yüan were probably less firm in their stand. On the other hand, Li Shun and Chen Kuan-yüan probably shared Feng Kuo-chang's viewpoint and were believed to be hostile to Tuan from the beginning.¹² On December 1, 1917, two Hupeh warlords declared their independence of the provincial government and threatened the position of Wang Chan-yüan. The short-lived peace was terminated and war broke out again. By the end of January 1918, Yüeh-chou (Hunan) was taken by the allied forces of Hunan and Kwangsi. These events were enough to change Wang's erstwhile unsympathetic attitude toward Tuan's policy. Earlier, on December 3, 1917, two days after the Hupeh warlords declared their independence, the military governors from Chihli (Ts'ao K'un), Shantung (Chang Huai-chih), and other provinces had assembled in Tientsin to discuss possible countermeasures. Apparently the conference was a fruitful one for Tuan, for on the 22nd of that month Chihli started sending a detachment to reinforce Wang Chan-yüan in Hupeh, and by the end of the month Shantung was also planning to send some contingents down to Hupeh but was refused transit by Kiangsu and Kiangsi.¹³ By the end of January 1918 the pressure on Feng Kuo-chang to wage a punitive war against the Hupeh rebels and their Hunan collaborators was so great that Feng was obliged to appoint Ts'ao K'un, Chang Huai-chih, and Chang Ching-yao to lead an expeditionary army to attack these two provinces.

Apparently, Ts'ao K'un's change of attitude was very important as he shifted from being a detractor to being an ardent supporter of Tuan's military policy. This change was likely to have been brought about in the short time between Tuan's resignation in November and the outbreak of the Hupeh revolt. It was possible that Tuan had by now regarded Kiangsu and Kiangsi as his archenemies and had given up any hope of bringing them around to accepting his policy. Instead, Ts'ao K'un's ties with Feng Kuo-chang were less strong, which made him more receptive to overtures from Tuan. Some kind of understanding might have been established between Tuan and Ts'ao, whereby the latter would support the former's policy in exchange for

concrete political rewards. Included in them might have been the affirmation of Ts'ao's position in Chihli and his candidacy to the vice-presidency with Tuan's support when the next election was due.¹⁴ In any event, as early as December 14, 1917, Tuan had already acquired Ts'ao's assurance of cooperation and had asked the military governors of Fengtien, Shensi, Shansi, Chekiang, Anhwei, and Kansu to put pressure on Feng to appoint Ts'ao to head the expedition. Feng succumbed to the pressure and ordered Ts'ao and his expeditionary force to march south on January 30, 1918. On the same day, Ts'ao was also made pacification commissioner (hsuan fu shih) of Hunan and Hupeh, and civil governor of Chihli. While the former assignment gave Ts'ao the full power to direct the campaign on the front, the latter further strengthened his position within the province of Chihli where he had already been the military governor.

Tuan's strategy was three-pronged. The conversion of Ts'ao K'un to the war party completed one task. But there were two more tasks to perform. The existence of the Kiangsu and Kiangsi bloc, under the direction of Feng Kuo-chang, meant that his policy might still encounter sabotage from that quarter. And the control of the cabinet in the hands of Wang Shih-chen, who was sympathetic to peaceful solution, was viewed by Tuan with suspicion. Therefore, in order to carry out his policy smoothly, Tuan had to eliminate the Kiangsu-Kiangsi bloc as well as take over the cabinet from Wang.¹⁵ Since Tuan still did not command sufficient forces of his own, he had to rely on other warlords. Ts'ao's force was already assigned to the war in the south, and the only warlord who was capable of aiding Tuan in both tasks seemed to be Chang Tso-lin. As early as February 1, 1918, a plan was under Tuan's deliberation to seek Fengtien's assistance.

According to this plan, Fengtien would dispatch a large force to the vicinity of Peking, ostensibly to reinforce the expeditionary force, but actually to pressure Feng Kuo-chang into dismissing Li Shun from Kiangsu and Wang Shih-chen from the premiership.¹⁶ In the meantime, the stubbornness of Feng's resistance increased. It seemed that Kiangsu was contemplating a more formal alliance with Kiangsi and Hupeh in order to act in coordination against Tuan and to refuse to permit Tuan's troops to pass through their respective territories.¹⁷ This development, however, did not disturb Tuan, for Fengtien's cooperation was virtually assured by the end of February. On January 28, 1918, Tuan caused the information to leak to Chang Tso-lin that a shipment of military equipment, including 27,000 rifles and some field guns, would arrive at Ch'in Huangtao aboard a Japanese ship on the 3rd of February.¹⁸ The government had purchased these arms partly to be distributed to provinces, but mainly to equip the troops for China's participation in the European war. With Tuan's collaboration, Fengtien troops intercepted the ship and took away all the arms. Obviously, Tuan did this as a favor to Chang and hoped that the latter would reciprocate by supporting him. Subsequently, on the 25th of February, Fengtien troops began to march into Chihli, where they took up strategic positions.

The clarification of Fengtien's attitude encouraged Tuan. Even before Fengtien troops had come, Tuan was making reprisals against Kiangsu and Kiangsi. On February 5, Ch'en Kuang-yuan of Kiangsi was stripped of his military rank by official order. On February 21, Chang Hual-chih was appointed high commissioner (chien yüeh shih) for Hunan and Kiangsi and was directed to divert part of the expeditionary army into Kiangsi, with the intention of ousting Ch'en from his post. Nor had Tuan forgotten the other thorn in his back—Li Shun of Kiangsu. It had been Tuan's conviction that Li must be removed before the Wang cabinet could be toppled.¹⁹ But the events in February changed the political atmosphere so much that it was no longer necessary to follow this tactic. The presence of Fengtien in the backyard of the central government apparently made the difference and, on March 6, Wang left Peking, having asked for sick leave, although this was not a formal resignation. In the meantime, the expeditionary army in Hunan regained some lost ground. On March 21, Fengtien sent some reinforcements down to Hunan and Hupeh. Two days later, Tuan succeeded in having himself again installed in the premier's office. With this, Tuan had performed all the three tasks he had initially set for himself and now he could turn his full attention to the execution of his war policy.

Once Tuan was back in power, he spared no effort to carry out his military policy. It must be remembered that the conquest of Hunan was not itself an ultimate objective, but a step toward the conquest of the southern provinces which had defied Tuan's authority. But his last experience had taught him that southern independence was only a more glaring manifestation of the disintegration of the country. The other warlords could be just as unruly as those in the south whenever they chose. Although he had succeeded painstakingly in subduing his opponents and forging a grand alliance for the Hunan campaign, he could not forget that the cooperation of men like Ts'ao and Chang had been secured only after certain political prices were paid. There was little to prevent them from turning against him just as they had before. Therefore, as Tuan saw it, the hope of unifying the country lay not in continued cooperation with these warlords, but in establishing a completely different army which would be placed under his firm control. In this sense, even the conquest of the southern provinces was now only preliminary to a larger objective which would include the elimination of all the potentially dangerous warlords. From this viewpoint, Chang Tso-lin, Ts'ao K'un, and others were only Tuan's temporary allies who might turn into future enemies. A unified country meant that all local centers of power would have to be circumscribed, and military power would definitely have to be eliminated from politics.²⁰

When Tuan was cooperating with the various warlords in the Hunan campaign, he was also undertaking measures to create an independent military force. In his previous career, Tuan had been close to Japanese officials and some of his cabinet ministers were well-known Nipponophiles (Chang Tsung-hsiang, Lu Tsung-yü, and Ts'ao Ju-lin). In a situation in which every warlord in the country was his potential enemy, it was only natural for Tuan to turn to Japan for assistance. Under his guidance, a Sino-Japanese Mutual Defense Pact was signed on May 16,²¹ less than two months from the day he resumed premiership. According to this pact, Japan was to help furnish the equipment and instructors for the establishment and training of three divisions and four brigades. Ostensibly, the purpose of these new forces was to prepare for China's participation in the European war. According to Tuan and his associates, the target number would at least be 500,000 or possibly one million men to be sent to France.²² Actually, it is highly doubtful if Tuan was ever serious about the promise. More likely, Tuan's main purpose was to use the new force to suppress his internal enemies. He appointed his most trusted subordinates to command this force, and gave it highly preferential treatment, since he had the Japanese military support.

In order to carry out unification of the country by force, Tuan needed money. Yet, since most of the local sources of revenue had been controlled by the local warlords, Tuan found it necessary to turn toward foreign assistance. Here again, he found the Japanese willing lenders. In the six months between March and October 1918, Tuan successfully negotiated at least six different loans with Japan totaling 120,000,000 Chinese yüan.²³ A few other loans were said to have been negotiated, but the exact amount was unknown.

With money in the coffer, and a huge army in the process of training, Tuan's next move was to control national politics. For this purpose an association of politicians and militarists mainly from the provinces of Anhwei and Fukien, called the Anfu Club, was founded in May 1918.²⁴ Their focus of power was parliament. In the new parliament that was convened in August 1918, the communications faction* occupied 100 or so seats, the research faction†

*"Communications faction" is a synonym for the Canton group, which was strongly entrenched in the Ministry of Communications.

†"Research faction" was also known as the "Yen Chiu faction," and the "Constitution-Studying Association." It was formed by members of the dissolved Chinputang (Progressive Party).

occupied some 20 seats, while the Anfu faction occupied 330 seats.²⁵ It was apparently Tuan's ambition to use this political instrument to dictate the coming presidential election and to dominate the central government.

However, during the summer a series of events took place that were ominous for Tuan. First, the contingent which he dispatched to subdue Kiangsi failed in its mission because on May 9 Li Shun of Kiangsu had sent military units to help Kiangsi resist this move. Tuan was thus obliged to abandon his hope of silencing the opposition by force. Second, new complications were developing at the front. Although the war had been going well for Tuan since March, it was Ts'ao K'un's subordinate Wu P'ei-fu who bore the brunt of the fighting. Since Wu almost singlehandedly had saved the northern armies from disaster and had defeated the Hunanese in battle after battle, it was natural for him to expect to be rewarded with the territory he had acquired when the time came to decide upon the governorship of Hunan. Yet, to Wu's most bitter disappointment, it was Chang Ching-yao, a man who had suffered many defeats at the hands of the Hunanese, but was closer to Tuan, who got the post.²⁶ Thereupon, Wu halted his advance. Although, in the next two months, Tuan made several attempts to bestow new titles upon Wu and encouraged him to move forward, the latter remained uninterested.

It seemed that Ts'ao K'un also had second thoughts after deciding to lead the expeditionary force to the south. He may not have approved of Tuan's scheme against Li Shun and Ch'en Kuang-yüan, two longtime Peiyang comrades, a conclusion suggested by Ts'ao's reluctance to support Tuan for the premiership, because he shared Li Shun's fear that once Tuan had taken that office he would take more repressive measures against Li, thus precipitating a break within the Peiyang community. Only after he had exacted some assurances from Tuan's men did he agree to lead the list of petitioners in support of Tuan's premiership.²⁷ At the same time a rumor circulated in several newspapers that Hsü Shu-cheng was about to replace Ts'ao as military governor of Chihli while Ts'ao would assume the new post of Inspector General of Hunan and Hupeh.²⁸ Whether true or not, this report evidently caused Ts'ao some apprehension that his long absence from home base might jeopardize his power there.

Wu P'ei-fu's disenchantment must also have influenced Ts'ao's attitude, since Ts'ao's power depended upon Wu's performance at the front. Tuan's disregard of Wu would be considered an indirect insult to Ts'ao. It also might be true that Wu's army was genuinely exhausted after prolonged engagement and, at the end of March 1918, Ts'ao was already complaining about the inadequacy of supplies.²⁹

As soon as Wu P'ei-fu reached Hengshan, he halted his march and began negotiating an informal truce with his Hunanese opponents. This was in the middle of April. By May 30, Ts'ao had totally lost his previous enthusiasm for the war, and on that date he left the Hunan front and went back to Chihli, where he remained during the rest of the war.

The change of attitude of Ts'ao and Wu was crystallized when, on the 21st of August, Wu and his subordinates issued a circular telegram openly advocating an immediate cessation of all civil wars. The southern military government responded warmly to Wu's suggestion. A month later, on the 26th of September, the commanding officers of all the northern and southern units at the Hunan front issued a joint statement calling for a general cessation of hostilities and the convening of a peace conference. On September 1, Hsü Shih-ch'ang was elected president by the overwhelming support of the Anfu Club. The same parliament failed to elect Ts'ao K'un as vice president at the election a month later, which was another of Tuan's broken promises to Ts'ao and, naturally, further alienated the two. The withdrawal of Ts'ao's support and the universal demand for the return to peace made it difficult for Tuan to stay in the cabinet, and he resigned on October 10, when the newly elected president, Hsü Shih-ch'ang, was inaugurated.

It is possible that, up to this time, Ts'ao and Wu were only thinking of forcing Tuan out of office so that the southern campaign could die a natural death. There was no evidence to suggest that they were contemplating eliminating Tuan as a political force. Tuan's resignation might be considered as the fulfillment of this limited objective.

They were soon to find themselves in error, however, for Tuan resigned only from the premiership, and determinedly remained as the head of the War Participation Bureau. Even after the conclusion of the First World War, Tuan managed to keep the War Participation Army, first changing its name to National Defense Army (kuo fang chün) and then to Northwestern Frontier Army (pien fang chün), and his first lieutenant, Hsü Shu-cheng, was named its commander on June 24, 1919. Earlier, in February, Tuan and Japan had signed an agreement to extend the Mutual Defense Pact until China and Japan had signed the peace treaty with both Germany and Austria and when all Allied forces had been evacuated from Chinese territory.³⁰ By virtue of this agreement, Tuan was assured of continued Japanese assistance in training his new force.

During all this time, the various elements in favor of peace had not been idle. At the urging of Ts'ao, the military governors of the three Yangtze provinces and the southern provinces, a peace conference was finally convened on February 20, and both governments sent plenipotentiary representatives. From the very beginning, however, the conference met with the determined resistance of Tuan who was opposed to any conciliatory attitude toward the southern rebels. The course of the negotiation was strewn with obstacles and, after much effort, the representatives from both sides felt compelled to resign from their posts. This formally ended any peace effort for the time being.

The failure of the peace conference undoubtedly antagonized Wu P'ei-fu and the three Yangtze provinces. But Tuan could still have relied upon the cooperation of Fengtien. However, Tuan's relationship with Chang Tso-lin had also turned sour during the past six months or so. When Fengtien first dispatched its troops into North China, Tuan's man, Hsü Shu-cheng, was appointed deputy commander of the Fengtien contingents stationed inside the Great Wall and was given considerable authority over the training and provision of these units. In the meantime, the Fengtien Army had grown into a strong force, thanks to the armies Chang acquired from Tuan. Also, by the end of 1918, its internal administration had been unified under the control of Chang. It was not surprising that Chang was beginning to look outward for more expansion. But Hsü's assignment to command the Northwestern Frontier Army, and his establishment of jurisdiction in the vast span of Inner Mongolia, effectively thwarted Chang's expansionist scheme, and the presence of the Northwestern Frontier Army in Fengtien's immediate neighborhood could be viewed only as a direct threat to the latter's security. These events drove Fengtien increasingly away from Tuan and closer to the recently emerging Chihli, which now consisted, at least, of the three Yangtze provinces and Chihli.

It seemed that at the beginning of 1920 an alliance between Fengtien and Chihli was being forged. Concrete measures toward this end were taken in the middle of March with the evacuation of Wu P'ei-fu's troops from the Hunan front. Around this time, it was rumored that Tuan was planning to replace the military governor of Honan with his own relative (Wu Kuang-hsiang).³¹ This report succeeded only in driving the military governor of Honan, Chao Ti, formerly an ally of Tuan, into the opposition. On April 9, a conference was called at Paoting out of which a so-called eight-province alliance was entered into by Chihli, Kiangsu, Kiangsi, Hupeh, Honan, and the three Fengtien provinces. From then on, the pattern of opposition became clear to everybody and a war seemed inevitable unless Tuan gave in. Specifically, Tuan's opponents made the following demands:

- (1) Reorganization of the cabinet to rid it of Anfu domination
- (2) Reopening of the peace conference, and appointment of a more satisfactory representative
- (3) Abolition of the Northwestern Frontier Bureau (ch'ou pien shih)
- (4) Transfer of the command of the Northeastern Frontier Army to the Ministry of War ³²

These demands, of course, proved totally unacceptable to Tuan. Thereupon, in late May, Wu completed his evacuation from Hunan which was immediately taken over by the local forces. Wu followed the Peking-Hankow Railway and started marching north. On June 19, Chang Tso-lin paid a visit to President Hsü. On the 21st, he went to see Tuan and had a long discussion. The day after, he went to Paoting where he had another conference with Ts'ao K'un. Possibly he made these trips to deliver the ultimatum to Tuan and to try to dissuade him from further pursuing his policy. At the same time, he may have wanted to make some final arrangements with Ts'ao and Hsü in case Tuan was recalcitrant. Tuan stood his ground. On July 4, by presidential order, Hsü Shu-cheng was stripped of his positions both as chief of the northwestern Frontier Bureau and as commander of the Northwestern Frontier Army. The army was to be put under the command of the Ministry of War. In defiance of this order the Northwestern Frontier Army was mobilized on the 6th of July, and declared war against Ts'ao. There was no response for six days. Then on July 12, Ts'ao and Chang made a joint declaration of war against Tuan. The opposing armies came into contact on the 14th, and by the 19th, all acts of hostility had ceased. The war was over and Tuan roundly defeated. Some of the more important characteristics of this phase can be summed up in the following fashion.

First, the disruption of the country almost immediately gave rise to a pattern of limited local reintegration. On the one hand, the small warlords cherished their newly acquired autonomy and many of the accompanying conveniences, while, on the other hand, the more powerful warlords, especially the provincial military governors, were vexed to see their territorial domains fragmented and their privileges infringed. They were determined to reclaim their authority and to consolidate their control. If they could not achieve their purpose by persuasion, they would do so by force. Therefore, wars occurred within many provinces, or between two neighboring provinces.

In 1917, Szechwan warlords were united in fighting off the troops from Yünnan and Kweichow. After the troops of the latter were successfully expelled from Szechwan, the local warlords immediately plunged into civil wars against each other. In October 1917, Ch'ao-chou of Kwangtung declared independence from the southern military government. In November, some military units in Chekiang attempted to declare independence, but failed. In December, Ching-chow of Hupeh declared independence, but failed. In January 1918, a minor warlord in Honan declared himself independent of the provincial warlord. Later in the same month, Hu Chin-yi declared his independence of the Shensi warlord and marked the beginning of several years of bitter struggle between them. During the year 1918, the warlords from Kwangtung and Fukien fought many skirmishes. The number of other unreported minor incidents of like nature must have been many times greater than those cited above. It is therefore safe to assume that in almost no province could the provincial military governor assert his authority without first having to deal with his local antagonists.

Out of these localized struggles, some provincial military governors emerged triumphant, but others were defeated and duly replaced by opponents. The task of internal consolidation was a formidable one, and in most cases consumed nearly all the energy of the warlords. For

the few who were capable of making inroads into other provinces, their activities were limited to their immediate neighbors. Tang Chi-yao had some success in extending his control over Kweichow and part of Szechwan but was eventually driven back to Yunnan. Only Chang Tso-lin was able to entrench himself in the whole of Manchuria.

Second, the efforts that most of these warlords employed to reintegrate their respective regions were also a reflection of the meager capabilities they possessed at this early phase of the system. One of these warlords commanded a large military unit. Before his monarchist coup, Chang Hsün had only 20,000 men under his command.³³ Yet he was regarded as the most powerful warlord in the whole country. An infantry division, roughly equal to about 15,000 men, was a highly potent military instrument, even in 1918-19. The whole show at Hunan was dominated by Wu P'ei-fu's 3d Division. Other northern military units which boasted of divisional strength, and looked formidable, were also present, but their incompetence was exposed as soon as they came into contact with the shabbily clad, ill-fed and poorly equipped Hunanese troops. By and large, the low capabilities of the warlords can be safely presumed.

Because of these two factors, the phase was characterized by high intraregional activities but low interregional activities. The warlords generally lacked both the energy and the capabilities to interact with each other, and thus there was small cause for conflict, and this phase was marked by the absence of large-scale hostilities. The various warlords were more concerned with their internal affairs than with affairs affecting the country as a whole. Even though they sometimes might express opinions on certain issues, they were limited as to action.

The campaign launched by Tuan against Hunan was in seeming contradiction to the above analysis. Actually, Tuan's activities were best explained by these two factors. We must not forget that Tuan did not have a personal military machine even as late as the end of 1917. Yet he was able to dominate politics on the national level precisely because no other warlords were powerful enough to intervene. The most reliable military backing of which he was usually assured was the military governor of Anhwei, Ni Tzu-ch'ung. He could also use his strategic position in the central government to hand out many favors to other provincial warlords in exchange for their general or specific support. By discreetly applying his influence, he was in a good position to make many friends, while his enemies could do him little harm. Thus, for instance, although Kiangsu and Kiangsi were avowedly opposed to Tuan, they had to content themselves with verbal denunciations only.

In addition, the Hunan campaign was not really so much of an exception to the absence of large-scale conflict that otherwise characterized the phase. It was possible to put the campaign into action because Tuan had succeeded in striking a deal with many warlords. Yet despite the fact that several divisions were sent to the front, most of the fighting was done by the 3d Division alone. In terms of both scale and intensity, the battles fought in Hunan were probably just as limited as those fought within Szechwan and along the Kwangtung-Fukien borders. All of them demonstrated the meager resources of the participants.

The political significance of the Hunan campaign must not be overlooked. It was the painful experience acquired through the execution of the campaign that prompted Tuan to seek outside assistance to establish an independent and personal military force. It was the desire to achieve a unified governmental policy to back up his military campaign that persuaded him to try to dominate the parliament and the cabinet with the Anfu political arm. Probably it was also Tuan's conviction that an effective and centralized government would not exist

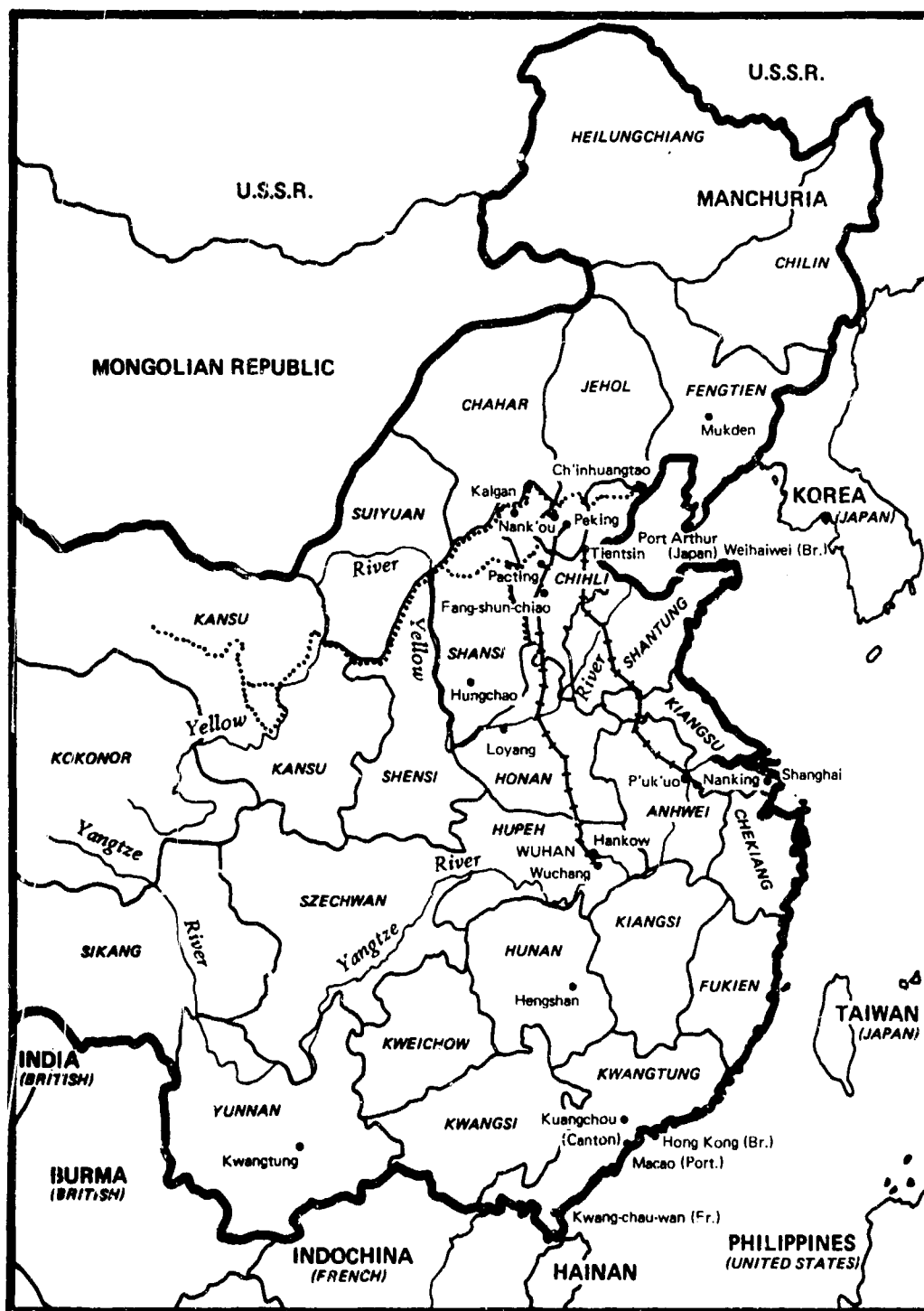


Figure 3. CHINA—1924

unless all the warlords were successfully brought under control, and that was to be done by force.

Tuan's political ambition and its many manifestations alarmed the warlords. If Tuan should succeed, the existence of the warlord rule would come to a quick end. The warlords would be stripped of their military power, and Tuan's personal military power would reign supreme, in the name of the central government. History suggests that it was the reaction to Tuan's aggressive policy that accelerated the formation of centers of counterforce. The Hunan campaign presented the warlords with the pressing need to organize themselves into more cohesive groups and ushered the warlord system into its second phase in which a more clarified picture was presented concerning the interactions among several groups of warlords who had decided to act together over a fairly long period of time.

Second Phase, 1920-24

When the system entered its second phase in 1920, the various groups involved had already assumed definite shapes. By the first half of 1920, the distribution of their respective power and location was approximately as follows:

Fengtien—Fengtien, Chilin, Heilungchiang

Anhwei—northern Chihli (including Peking), Shantung, Jehol, Chahar, Suiyian, Shensi, Anhwei, Chekiang, and Fukien

Chihli—southern Chihli, Honan, Kiangsu, Kiangsi, and Hupeh

KMT—Kwangtung, Kwangsi, Yunnan, Kweichow

Szechwan—Szechwan

Hunan—Hunan

Shansi—Shansi

The first three groups—Fengtien, Chihli, and Anhwei—were definitely of dominant importance. The state of the KMT was a little less certain. In term of size and aggregate strength, it was surely on an equal footing with any of the first three factions. But its internal division had immobilized it at least for the time being and would not justify its being put in the category with the major groups. It might be appropriate to regard it as potentially important, but as assuming a nonessential role at the time.

Anhwei-Chihli War

The Anhwei-Chihli war of 1920 was the first large-scale war involving more than half the provinces in the country. It also marked the first time that two factions had entered into an alliance to block what in their view was a hegemonic group before it had a chance to carry out its scheme of conquest. Indirectly, it was a manifestation that events which took place in the system now had assumed a system-wide dimension. This, in turn, suggests that the various provincial warlords had by now established themselves with sufficient firmness in their respective areas or provinces so that they were able to look outward and to become concerned with developments that might affect the overall distribution of power within the system.

Manner of Fighting

The manner in which the war was fought warrants some attention. Before the war started, Tuan was supremely confident that he would win. His prediction that he would annihilate the Chihli force within 100 hours was widely shared by informed people.³⁴ However, although the war lasted only about four days, it was Chihli which emerged as the victor. The main burden of fighting was, of course, borne by the Northwestern Frontier Army on the Anhwei side and the 3d Division and some contingents drawn from the nearby provinces of Honan and Chihli on the Chihli side. The Northwestern Frontier Army had been in training under a unified command for about two years, but the Chihli forces lacked a unified structure of command and one had to be improvised in a very short time by forces drawn together from units which had hitherto been under separate commands. Both sides, however, exhibited an appalling lack of coordination. As soon as fighting started, all previous planning was ignored, and units conducted the war individually. There was also an apparent lack of enthusiasm and seriousness concerning the war on both sides. Orders from above were executed halfheartedly. Units were more anxious to preserve their own strength than to fight the enemy. Prior to the fighting, there was a long period of troop maneuvering on both sides, contending for advantageous positions. Yet, no serious fighting took place during the war. Casualties were low, although the exact numbers could not be determined. There were many defections and even mutinies whenever the tide of events seemed to be turning. The commander-in-chief of Anhwei deserted his army and fled to safety when he heard of the reverses at the front. The only exception to this general pattern was the 3d Division whose fighting courage and spirit of sacrifice snatched the victory for Chihli.³⁵

In general, the scale of hostilities was limited. The main battlefield remained in the area adjacent to Peking and Tientsin along the principal railways. The vast territories under the influence of both groups were not involved, although the southern areas were mobilized but did not take part in the combat, apparently for fear of a surprise attack by their counterparts from the opposite side. Consequently, the number of direct participants in the war was restricted.

Although the numerous cases of defections and mutinies hindered the war effort, their importance must not be overemphasized, because they were usually foreseen and did not necessarily influence decisively the outcome of the war, so long as the bulk of the troops kept on fighting. The lack of coordination among the troops was coincident with the fact that each combat unit was assigned to play a less significant role than its size deserved. Overwhelming reliance was placed on one or two "loyal" units. Thus defections and mutinies were not grave threats or disrupting factors to the basic strategic planning unless they occurred on a very large scale, as in the case of Anhwei.

The defeat of Anhwei greatly reduced its capabilities. Most important of all, it lost control of the central government and many of the incidental advantages. With the dissolution of the Anfu Club, Anhwei also lost control of the parliament. The Northwestern Frontier Army was totally destroyed. Some units surrendered and were subsequently incorporated into the victors' military structure. Other units simply disintegrated and disappeared. The loss in terms of territory was enormous. Of the eight provinces it either controlled or influenced at the peak of its power, only Chekiang and Fukien remained, and from 1920 on Anhwei's importance decreased.

After the conclusion of hostilities, the two victors convened to divide the spoils. A new cabinet was formed with a premier acceptable to both (Chin Yün-p'eng was related to Chang

Tso-lin by marriage). With respect to territory, Fengtien acquired Jehol, Chahar, and Suiyüan, while Chihli was given a free hand in Shantung, Shensi, Honan, and Anhwei.

The victorious alliance was soon to collapse, however. In fact, seeds of conflict had been planted even before the war was won. The Anhwei-Chihli war started on the 14th and ended on the 19th of July. The brunt of the fighting for the alliance was borne by Wu P'ei-fu's forces. Fengtien forces did not show up on the battlefield until almost the last day, when the trend of fighting was apparently turning against Anhwei, and they arrived just in time to seize a large quantity of weapons from the enemy.³⁶ These acts could only incur the anger of Chihli.

Fengtien-Chihli War

From Fengtien's point of view, the growth of Chihli power was a threatening sign. It should be remembered that Chihli's strength was hastily composed, mainly in reaction to Anhwei's hegemonic policy. At the time of the war, the various provinces still retained a large measure of autonomy. Bolstered by its recent victory, Chihli soon embarked on a more energetic policy toward internal consolidation. It scored its first victory when it was able to keep Kiangsu from breaking away after Li Shun had committed suicide. In May 1921, Chihli succeeded in ousting the incumbent military governor of Shensi and planted one of its own men, Yen Hsiang-wen, in that position. Two months later (July-August 1921), revolt broke out in Hupeh, and Wang Chang-yüan was forced to flee from his office. Although nominally a Chihli member, Wang was himself a senior member of the Peiyang Army and was not as subservient to Ts'ao K'un as some of the other provincial warlords. Naturally, Ts'ao was not overly anxious to lend a helping hand to Wang, but Hupeh was a strategically important province. In addition to controlling the navigation of the Yangtze River, Hupeh also controlled a section of the Peking-Hankow Railway, the importance of which was amply demonstrated in Tuan's Hunan campaign. Moreover, Hankow was not only an important commercial city but one of the nation's leading industrial complexes which, among other things, included one of the best arsenals in the country. Chihli could not afford to lose such a province. Therefore, when it became apparent that the situation might get out of hand, an expeditionary force under the command of Wu P'ei-fu was dispatched to the area and swiftly put down the revolt. But instead of returning the province to Wang, one of Wu's chief lieutenants, Hsiao Yao-nan, was installed as its military governor. In fact, Wu's force not only conquered Hupeh, but defeated the allied forces of Hunan and Szechwan and occupied a portion of Hunan's territory.

Chang Tso-lin did not view the development of these events with equanimity. For they had decisively altered the ratio of power that had existed at the conclusion of the last war. The conquest of Hupeh and the limited invasion of Hunan must have been especially irritating to Chang because of the capabilities it represented to Chihli in terms of territory, financial resources, and military power. If Chihli was to be allowed to pursue the same course, it was not inconceivable that it would follow exactly the same line of policy as that advocated by Anhwei.

If the above possibility had been Chang's main apprehension about the power of Chihli, he did not have to look far to substantiate it. Ever since the war, Wu had been silent on national affairs and had devoted himself almost exclusively to the intensive training of troops at the base of Loyang. Military schools of elementary and secondary levels were set up to promote combat techniques. The logistic system was revised and improved. Attention was given to establishing a navy, an air force, and arsenals. The 3d Division formed the backbone of this program, but units from other loyal warlords were also involved to varying degrees. A centralized military command system was obviously beginning to take shape.³⁷ The prowess of this army was unmistakably demonstrated by the rapidity with which it suppressed the Hupeh rebels.

Therefore, by the end of 1921, both factions had some grievances against each other and the relationship between them was gradually deteriorating. However, there was still one field in which they had had smooth cooperation—the field of national politics. Up to the end of 1921, the cabinet under the premiership of Chin Yun-p'eng had enjoyed the blessing of both Chihli and Fengtien. Chin was careful to assume a neutral attitude with respect to these two areas and acted on important issues only after their concurrence had been secured. However, almost since its formation (August 1920), the cabinet had been in financial straits. Two subsequent reshufflings of the members had not improved the situation. On the contrary, the finances of the government had gone from bad to worse, and in November 1921 clerks in the Ministry of Education refused to work unless the government paid what it owed them in salaries.³⁸ For the same reason, the officials of the Peking judiciary collectively requested leave of absence.³⁹ The situation apparently called for some fundamental solution, such as the creation of a new cabinet. At this time, Chang Tso-lin maneuvered to have his own choice, Liang Shih-yi, named to form the new cabinet on December 24, 1921. This choice did not have Chihli's full support from the beginning, but what angered the latter and drove it to challenge the new cabinet's authority was its failure to make the allotment of military expenses previously promised to Wu.⁴⁰ Immediately, on January 5, 1922, Wu issued a circular telegram opposing the Liang cabinet, charging it with treason. A chorus of protests came from the military governors of Kiangsu, Kiangsi, Honan, Shensi, Hupeh, Anhwei, Shantung, and Shansi. The situation worsened when, on January 19, 1922, Wu led the military governors from six of these eight territories (excluding Anhwei and Shansi) to announce their determination to sever relations with the cabinet unless Liang was promptly removed. In face of this stiff opposition, Liang took sick leave on 31st of January, requesting his foreign minister to act in his absence.

There was no question that Fengtien had suffered a great loss of face in the whole event. Although Liang did not resign formally, his leave meant that Fengtien's plan to dominate the cabinet and national politics must be abandoned for the time being at least. But Wu was not to be satisfied with his temporary victory, for on the 26th of February, he again attacked the cabinet. This time, the target was the minister of finance who was charged with embezzlement. If Chang Tso-lin had any doubt about Wu's previous attack on Liang, his subsequent attack on the minister of finance should have made it abundantly clear that he aimed at toppling the whole cabinet supported by Fengtien. During the two years after 1920, Wu had been very reticent about politics on the national level. The sudden outbursts of political opinions after his troops had undergone a long period of intensive training was an ominous sign to Fengtien. Considered in conjunction with Chihli's other consolidating measures which had greatly increased its power, the behavior of Wu could easily be interpreted that Chihli was about to pursue a hegemonic policy to dominate national politics and to carry out a policy of national unification by force. However Fengtien might have interpreted Chihli's long range goal, it surely recognized its short-range conflict of interest with Chihli and started looking for allies.

In order to counter the threat from Chihli, Fengtien sent emissaries to Kwangtung to seek cooperation with Sun Yat-sen in February 1922, and entered into an alliance with the KMT.⁴¹ Next, Fengtien attempted to induce the Anhwei remnants in the south—Chekiang and Fukien—to join in making a tripartite alliance.⁴² Furthermore, Chang might reasonably have expected an internal division of opinion among the Chihli warlords. Since the Changs and the Ts'aos were related by marriage, the Ts'ao brothers were understandably less eager to go to war with their close relatives. There were indications that Chang made a good guess on the last account. The Ts'ao brothers must have applied tremendous pressure on Wu to adopt a more moderate position, for on March 10, Wu issued a circular telegram denying recent reports that Fengtien and Chihli were about to meet on the battlefield, stating that his opposition to Liang Shih-yi was limited only to his foreign policy, and not to his leading the cabinet. Compared with the tone

of his earlier statements in the cabinet crisis, this was exceptionally mild. The change of Wu's attitude in a matter of two weeks (since he last attacked the minister of finance) could have no better explanation than that he was made to do so by the Ts'ao brothers. Chang Tso-lin, however, refused to be appeased. On the last day of March, he announced that the 27th Division would be transported from Fengtien to the vicinity of Peking to bolster the defense of that city. He apparently felt strong because of the new allies he had won and was determined to exact some major concessions from Chihli.

In the first half of April, Chang Ts'ao-yun, Chang Tso-lin's younger brother, twice went to Fengtien to seek a peaceful solution. But Chang would not budge unless the Liang cabinet was restored and Wu and other militarists desisted from meddling with national politics. This was much more than Chihli was prepared to concede, and the negotiations soon broke off. From the middle of April, both groups were busy transporting troops to the front. Many senior Peiyang militarists also endeavored to bring both sides back to the conference table again, but their efforts were of no avail. It was not until April 25 that Chihli formally denounced Chang Tso-lin, and four days later war broke out.

In several respects, the first Chihli-Fengtien war of 1922 was far different from the Anhwei-Chihli war of 1920. Substantially larger numbers of troops engaged in the actual combat. It was estimated that at least 100,000 soldiers from each side were involved in active fighting. This represented an important increase of capabilities on both sides. For Chihli, troops were drawn from all provinces close to the front. This necessitated the movement of some troops from Hunan and Hupeh to take over the garrison duty in these provinces. Also, in contrast to the 1920 war, serious fighting took place on all fronts and casualties were reported high. On the other hand, defections became less and less frequent. Sometimes a whole unit would fight to the last man instead of surrendering. Many division and brigade commanders were either injured or killed in action.

The combat zone was considerably enlarged, too. It was extended to practically the whole border area between the armies. A high degree of mobility was demonstrated throughout the war. Logistics and communications had improved markedly since the last war. The battlefield was partitioned into three theaters. The troops in each theater no longer fought separately, but in close coordination with friendly troops in other theaters. In the last phase of the war, a large number of troops from both sides were concentrated at the western front where many of the bloodiest battles took place. Again, the concentration of troops on such a grand scale and with such speed and orderliness could not have been accomplished in 1920.

After a week of fierce fighting, Fengtien was defeated and driven out of the Great Wall. While the inferiority of the Fengtien military establishment was the main reason for its defeat, the failure of the tripartite alliance to make the concerted attack originally conceived was another factor. Sun Yat-sen's plan to launch a northern expedition into Kiangsi was blocked by local warlords inside the south. Sun's inability to fulfill his promise in turn made it inadvisable for Chekiang to take unilateral action, as it was surrounded by Chihli warlords on three sides. Thus, the 1922 war left Fengtien in a much diminished status.

Results of the War

The victory was a boost for Chihli in general and for Wu in particular. The provinces of Jehol, Chahar, and Suiyuan were added to the territory of Chihli. The revolt of Honan was quickly smashed, bringing that province closer to Chihli which now became the supreme military power in the system. Fengtien could do little for the time being except to nurse its newly

inflicted wounds. The KMT was as weak as ever. Anhui remnants were only too happy that they were able to emerge unscathed from the war and did not dare to stir up any more trouble. The other factions were also anxious that Chihli should leave them alone. If Chihli had shown any caution before 1922 about interfering with national politics, it did not need to worry now. The decks were cleared and Chihli moved directly into the core of national politics. Ten days after the victory, some junior Chihli warlords proposed to restore Li Yuan-hung to the presidency and to reconvene the parliament of 1917 to elect a vice president. ⁸ After another four days (May 19, 1922) Ts'ao, Wu, and a train of Chihli dignitaries sent a joint telegram to all the provinces requesting them to express themselves in relation to this proposal. ⁹ The message was too clear to miss. On June 2, President Hsu duly handed over the presidential seal to the cabinet, resigned the office, and left the capital. In less than a week, Li was back in office, under the aegis of Chihli power.

But Li was destined to be disillusioned. There was no mistake about who was the real power. The cabinet he had helped to form did not meet Chihli approval and stayed in office for only six months (until November 1922). One of its ministers was framed on a criminal charge and jailed illegally. The composition of the cabinets was dictated by Chihli and policies closely followed its orders.

By now, however, Chihli was no longer satisfied with mere control of the cabinet. By January 1923 it became clear that Ts'ao K'un was intent on taking the presidency for himself. Information leaked out in that month to the effect that Ts'ao was spending a large sum of money to buy off the parliamentary members. ¹⁰ In the next few months, the tenure of Li Yuan-hung's presidency suddenly became a focal point of heated debate. ¹¹ In June the pace of putting Ts'ao in the presidency was accelerated. On June 6, several hundred army officers and policemen surrounded the presidential mansion to demand the payment of their salaries which had been long overdue. On June 9, Peking policemen started a general strike. Three days later, Inspector General of the Army, Feng Yt-hsiang, and commander of the Peking garrison command, Wang Huai-ching, handed in their resignations and declared that they would no longer be responsible for maintaining order in the capital. ¹² During those days, Li's personal residence was repeatedly harassed by organized crowds. Electricity and running water were cut off. These acts finally forced Li to flee to Tientsin. ¹³ After a period of caretaking government, the presidential election was held on October 5, 1922, and Ts'ao K'un was duly elected. Five days later, Ts'ao was formally inaugurated.

The whole thing aroused a great furor in the country. This was the first time since Yuan Shih-k'ai that the parliamentary members had been openly bribed in exchange for their votes. A flood of protests and denunciations came from many different quarters. Fengtien, the KMT, and Anhui issued separate statements opposing the illegally elected president. But the war between Chihli and its opponents, which was so widely anticipated, did not break out until a year later. Several reasons might have accounted for this delay.

First, ever since the end of the 1922 war, there were indications that a rift was slowly developing within Chihli among two rival factions. The Tientsin-Paoting faction was a staunch advocate of putting Ts'ao in the presidency as soon as possible, and was responsible for engineering the various acts that culminated in Li's flight and Ts'ao's inauguration. The Loyang faction centered around Wu P'ei-fu, who was not opposed in principle to Ts'ao's seeking the presidency but who was convinced that the first thing to do would be to unify the country. Their differences on many other issues had put a great strain on the internal cohesion of Chihli. ¹⁴ Although Wu did not openly voice his disagreement with the manner by which Ts'ao acquired his presidency, he was clearly unsympathetic toward it. Therefore, after the election, Ts'ao was handling Chihli's relations with other groups with great caution, probably because he needed time to smooth over the internal divisions and to placate Wu in particular.

Second, Chihli was already making some progress in Fukien and probably did not want to push its pace too fast. In March 1923, Sun Ch'uan-fang and Chou Yin-jen were sent to Fukien to wrest that province from Anhwei's hands. They were met by strong resistance and had to fight their way into the province. Understandably, Chihli would not want to make enemies on more than one front.

Third, from Chihli's point of view, the most dangerous challenge to its power would undoubtedly come from Fengtien. The defeat of 1922 was a great blow to the latter and revealed the weakness of the Fengtien Army as organized and commanded along the traditional line. Therefore, once retreated from the Great Wall, Chang Tso-lin immediately began a reform program by recruiting officers who had received modern military education. It was about this time that men like Yang Yü-t'ing and Kuo Sung-lin quickly rose in the Fengtien hierarchy. Chang also paid more attention to the training and supply of his troops, and under the management of Yang Yü-t'ing the Mukden arsenal was modernized and greatly increased its output. During this time, Chang conspicuously abstained from involving himself in national politics. He was all absorbed in pushing his reform program.

The steady strengthening of the Fengtien Army obviously caused Chihli some grave concern. Between August and October of 1923, Chihli sent many emissaries to Fengtien, trying to persuade it to renounce its autonomy and to rejoin the government.⁵² Even when the Fengtien representative, together with other representatives from Chekiang and the southern provinces, issued a stern denunciation from Shanghai on October 13, against Ts'ao's presidency and threatened to form a separate government, Chihli conveniently ignored it. These events suggest that Chihli realized that it had more urgent business and was extremely careful not to get into a direct confrontation with Fengtien at that time.

Despite its bold words, Fengtien was probably equally cautious. There was no doubt that its military program was geared to a final confrontation with Chihli, but at the end of 1923 that program had been in execution for only little more than a year. However much Fengtien would have liked to aid Anhwei in Fukien, it was effectively prevented from doing so because its own army had not been sufficiently overhauled to meet the test. Furthermore, it should be remembered that if Fengtien had decided to move against Chihli, it would have to fight the latter without the benefit of KMT's participation. For this was the period when the KMT was just beginning to be in a position to tighten its reigns over the province of Kwangtung. Throughout 1923, the KMT was occupied in exploiting the division of the southern warlords and in defeating them individually. In the meantime, the party itself had also been undergoing a more thorough reorganization since the beginning of that year. These two simultaneously progressing trains of events were absorbing all the energy and resources that the KMT could spare at this stage, and made it unable to turn its attention to adjusting its external relations. Thus, for Fengtien, when the possibility of forging a second triple alliance with the same factions was blocked, it decided to bide its time for a more opportune moment for the final showdown.

When all of these factors are taken into consideration, the peace that prevailed does not seem as unusual as it might have done at first look.

Although war did not break out immediately, the tension was at best only temporarily subdued. The continuance of Chihli's policy of dominating the central government and seeking to expand its territorial domain was bound to lead it into a collision course with the other involved groups. A year after the inauguration of Ts'ao, the objective situations had changed substantially. Fengtien had gained one more year to train its troops. The KMT had founded its own military academy and Sun Yat-sen was again planning for a northern expedition. Although the military academy was not yet able to produce a significant number of soldiers to

participate in the expedition, and Sun's plan was to prove yet another futile effort to march north, his determination might have been a great encouragement to Fengtien. On the other hand, Chihli had now firmly established its control over Fukien and was in a much more comfortable position to deal with Fengtien. Therefore, all three factions were in an expectant mood. What was needed was an explosive issue. Precisely such an issue was provided by Chekiang. Chekiang had received and incorporated into its command the Anhwei remnants that evacuated from Fukien.⁵³ This move considerably strengthened its position against the southern provinces of Chihli. In August 1924, Kiangsu, Kiangsi, Anhwei, and Fukien delivered an ultimatum demanding that Chekiang disband these troops. Chekiang refused, and war broke out on September 1.

It would be difficult to understand how Chekiang would dare to defy the superior power of Chihli unless it had secured Fengtien's pledge of assistance. If this was so, that assistance was not slow in coming. On September 5, Chang Tso-lin announced that his army would support Chekiang. On that same day, Sun Yat-sen also announced that he would lead a northern expedition in a matter of days. On September 17, Chihli set up the command to wage war against Fengtien. By October 13, the Chihli-Anhwei war ended with the total defeat of the latter. In the north, Chihli and Fengtien were locked in severe fighting. Then suddenly, on October 23, came the news that Feng Yü-hsiang of Chihli had clandestinely returned from the front, occupied the capital, and taken over the central government. This shattered the morale of the Chihli troops. In a matter of days, its front was broken and the whole army was routed. Wu P'ei-fu made a desperate attempt to rescue the capital, but his action was futile and he fled to the south with a few thousand soldiers. On November 3, hostility on all fronts ceased.⁵⁴ The period of Chihli's domination was formally ended, although it still retained a large territory of the Yangtze Valley.

Increasing Warlord Capabilities

With the defeat of Chihli, the second phase of the Chinese warlord system also was brought to a conclusion. As we mentioned before, the beginning of this phase marked the point in time when the system was moving toward a "balance of power" system. Although the Chinese leaders were mindful of strengthening their economic capabilities, their main attention was focused on the means for increasing their military capabilities. Consequently, it was in the military field that competition was keenest. The reason was easy to understand. Almost all warlords realized that they lacked a firm basis of legitimacy. Their defiance of the national government and their exploitative policy had alienated the people. At the same time, they had made themselves vulnerable to each other. To prevent popular uprising and to defend against fellow warlords, they were compelled to rely increasingly on brute force. The increase of the total number of soldiers in the country was but one indication of the effort the warlords made to increase their military capabilities. Perhaps the major wars fought in this phase were themselves reflections of the increase of military capabilities. The intensification of the fighting, the mounting casualties, and the expansion of the conflict zones, as well as the ever larger number of troops marshaled by the chief antagonists, all pointed to the fact that the warmaking machinery of the groups was being refined constantly. The training of the War Participation Army by Anhwei, the training program of Chihli at Loyang, and the reform of the Fengtien Army between 1922 and 1924 were specific examples of how much effort the leaders put into their military establishment.

Yet the primary interest in the increase of capabilities was not confined to achieving parity with competitors. What they aspired to was a margin by which they could comfortably be assured of security. Thus, in pursuing its own preponderance, each group actually sought

imbalance rather than balance in the system. This made the competition all the more hazardous. Since their capabilities constituted the sole guarantee of their present status, it would be intolerable if any other faction should become so strong as to be menacing. Each group was primarily concerned with increasing its own capabilities with the utmost vigilance. In the meantime, each one was equally concerned with blocking the other efforts toward the same goal. It became impossible to reconcile these two conflicting goals. When the attainment of either of them was frustrated to an important degree, clashes of interests among the factions might lead to war as a means of redressing the balance and adjusting differences.

Yet, when the balance was disturbed, the groups involved always demonstrated a willingness to negotiate for a peaceful settlement. Thus, all three major wars were preceded by a period of tension during which the main antagonists or some third party tried to resolve the points of conflict at the conference table. Only after negotiation failed did the parties go to war. In 1920, the refusal of Anhwei to relinquish its control over the War Participation Army was the direct cause of war. In 1922, Fengtien was determined to retain the Liang Shih-yi cabinet in power because it thought this was the only way to compensate for its relative disadvantage in territorial expansion in comparison with Chihli. When both sides stood their ground, war broke out. In 1924, Anhwei (Chekiang) was unwilling to disband a part of its army, and Fengtien was unwilling to see another aggrandizement of Chihli power at the expense of Anhwei. Again the consequence was war. In every one of these instances, those involved refused to forego an opportunity to increase capabilities, and chose to fight.

The weakening of Anhwei coincided with the gradual strengthening of the KMT, and during a great part of this phase, these two groups often took concerted action. Of course, it was true that Anhwei was profoundly different from the KMT so far as their respective impacts on the system as a whole were concerned.

Each of the three major wars was brought about by the hegemonic design of one group—Anhwei in 1920, and Chihli in both 1922 and 1924. In each case the other groups were able to enter into alliance quickly and to oppose the hegemonic group. In 1920, the alliance included Fengtien and Chihli; in 1922 and 1924, the alliances included Fengtien, Anhwei, and the KMT. These groups were weaker in their individual strength and were more or less the intended victims of the hegemonic groups. Therefore, in every instance, it was a defensive alliance of the weak against the strong which became the general rule.

Several factors had made the observance of this rule possible in the Chinese system. First of all, decisions were actually made by a relatively small number of people—the military leaders of the units.⁵⁵ This does not mean that decisions were made by dictation, which happened only rarely. In most cases, those involved had to bargain and compromise. Yet the decision-making process was simplified because only a handful of people participated and because the participants shared some fundamental agreement on policy goals; that is, how to augment their military power. Popular participation was completely and effectively barred. Even nonmilitary pressure groups were generally prevented from operating. Recognition of interests and rapidity of action tended to have positive effects on external relations. In short, the internal structure of the Chinese system was conducive to action rather than inaction. In matters of alignment the ability to act fast was itself an important asset.

Personal Alignments

Moving from the structure of the warlord system to personnel, we find that there was a special "culture" to which most participants belonged. Chapter 3 describes the existence of

a complicated web of personal relationships among the important warlords. Equally important was the fact that their common social and economic backgrounds and the degrees to which they were influenced by traditional concepts gave them common values (generally conservative in outlook, although frequently vaguely defined) which greatly improved their mutual understanding. Furthermore, the idea that most of them had come from the Peiyang Army seems to have been taken very seriously by the warlords. Talk about Peiyang cohesion, comradeship, and group spirit was frequently heard and heeded. It would be safe to deduce that the warlords really felt that there was an affinity among them, and it was a matter of personal honor that they should observe a code of behavior. Although they might fight with each other, they tried hard not to inject a strong personal feeling into the issues. Magnanimity toward the defeated was a highly cherished virtue. Once the fight was over, no personal animosity should remain. Thus, after almost every conflict, the victors would declare a number of defeated warlords outlaws and issue warrants to arrest them. Almost always, however, these orders were not intended to be carried out. One noticeable departure from this pattern occurred when Li Chin-lin of Fengtien confiscated the properties of eight Chihli leaders after the 1924 war, but later atoned for his rash action by returning all the properties when he had to solicit the cooperation of Chihli against Feng Yü-hsiang and his Kuominchün (Nationalist Army).⁵⁶ The practical implication of this trait on the working of the Chinese system was easy to fathom. Such a code of behavior among the warlords meant that they usually did not make lasting enemies. Given the precarious and fluid situation in China, one could never be certain if today's enemies would not become tomorrow's allies. Consequently, the leading warlords were by and large highly flexible in their alignment policy, and every warlord was a potential ally. The concern was with issues, with the requirements of self-interest, and not with persons. Thus, power developments within the system were viewed without passion, and alliances made and broken in accordance with short-term interests to counter specific and immediate threats. Thus, although Anhwei was Fengtien's enemy in 1920, neither of them found any difficulty in working together against Chihli in 1922 and 1924. The fact that the same groups entered into alliances in 1922 and 1924 did not indicate a specific alignment pattern, but merely the continued presence of the threat from Chihli.

Yet, readiness to work with any faction for short-term purposes was a necessity. Adequate and quick information was needed to help recognize the change of power distribution in the system, to identify the threatening faction, and to take countervailing measures as fast as possible. In the Chinese system, information was improved by a conscientious effort to establish channels of communication. Important warlords exchanged emissaries who were regularly stationed at the various provincial capitals. Special envoys were dispatched when the situation required them. Informally, personal connections among high-ranking officials were utilized to collect information. As a consequence, the flow of information generally was unobstructed, and each warlord was pretty well-informed about the others. As the history of the second phase shows, none of the major wars were brought about by mutual misunderstanding or insufficient information. Each group-participant knew full well what the other was up to. The wars were the outcome of cool-headed deliberation and negotiation.

Lack of Ideology

Still another factor which may have enhanced the flexibility of alignment was the lack of ideology. Since the founding of the republic, the political parties had been little more than loose associations among national politicians and provincial notables. These parties had no local base from which to draw their political support: even their national organization lacked cohesion. Even if we accept these groups as parties, we will find that they all were strikingly nonideological. The principles they espoused were so broad and so similar that they could be

easily subscribed to by almost anyone. Consequently, it was difficult to rally people under the banner of one party rather than another. Coupled with the insufficiency of organization, these broad principles soon degenerated into political clichés that even the warlords could appropriate to their own use. Also, there was no ideological party which had a territorial base. Much has already been written to demonstrate that the KMT in Kwangtung was more a name than a reality for a number of years.

The absence of ideologically committed groups meant that the pattern of alignment was not predetermined. No faction was compelled to take a certain position in order to remain true to its organizing principles. It further meant that no group would be influenced by factors beyond, or even inimical to, its immediate interests. Finally, it meant that no faction had a rigid mode of social and political relationships which it was determined to impose on the overall Chinese political system.

Despite the KMT's repeated efforts to picture itself as a distinct ideological party, the northern warlords were obviously suspicious of its seriousness. It is hard to imagine that the northern warlords deliberately shut their eyes to reality. It must be remembered that the reorganization of the KMT came only after 1923 and 1924. During a great part of this second phase, the KMT actually had not acted differently from its northern counterparts. At one time or another, it had concluded or attempted to conclude alliance with virtually every other group in the system to whose very political existence it was ideologically opposed. The warlords were pragmatic politicians by both instinct and training. They believed that they knew too much about high-sounding principles to heed them, for they themselves were experts in exploiting the propaganda value of whatever principles might benefit their personal cause. Conscious of their own experience, they found it hard to believe that anyone else could have acted differently. Therefore, they had learned to judge other factions by behavior rather than by words. This belief, which was periodically confirmed and encouraged by KMT's alignment preference, helped to maintain the atmosphere of mutual acceptability of all factions in matters of alignment.

The "Balancing Process"

The fact that three major wars took place within five years bears testimony to the balancing process of this phase. One notion which was prevalent among traditional "balance of power" theorists was that the "balance of power" system was most stable when warfare was absent or nearly so. Indeed, such would be an ideal situation. On the other hand, the presence and frequency of warfare could also be an indication of the stability, rather than of the instability, of the system. The types of wars must be differentiated. In the second phase of the Chinese warlord system, the wars were all fought because the status quo groups banded together to halt the hegemonic policy of a stronger group. In this sense, the frequency of warfare was the best evidence of how well the balancing mechanism of the Chinese warlord system was functioning. [The second phase was, therefore, actually a phase of dynamic equilibrium.]

The same, however, cannot be said of the less important groups, for they demonstrated the greatest reluctance to participate in the regulatory process of the Chinese warlord system in this phase. Because of the wide discrepancy in capabilities between the primary and secondary groups, the latter were always fearful that their active participation in the system would drag them into a perennial struggle for power that might threaten their security. It was not by accident that the rise of Chihli's power in the system coincided with the beginning of the movement of the so-called provincial constitutionalism and federalism. In their desperate attempt to keep themselves in the system, the minor groups turned to the exploitation of latent

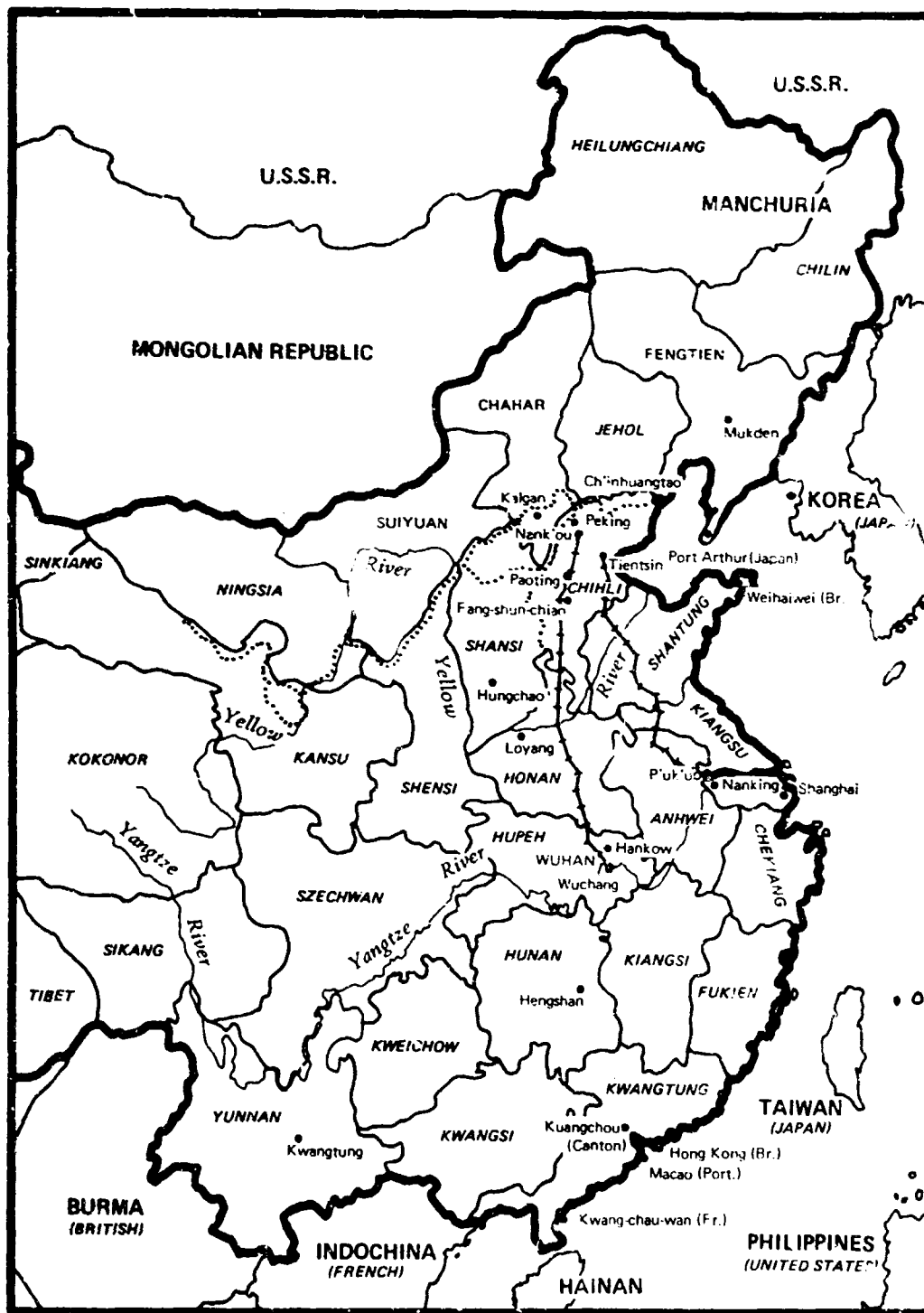


Figure 4. CHINA-1928

regional sentiments as a measure of protection. The first province to espouse provincial constitutionalism was Hunan. Hunan's peculiar geographical location and experience of repeated intrusion by invaders made its action highly understandable. Two days after Chihli's victory over Anhwei (1920), the military governor declared that his government would draft a constitution. On January 1, 1922, the constitution was officially promulgated, after a nominal plebiscite.

In the meantime, other groups had also followed suit. In January, 1921, a group of Szechwan generals declared their readiness to carry out constitutional self-government in that province. In the same month, Kweichow also declared for self-government. In June, Chekiang (following Anhwei's defeat) announced it would draft a provincial constitution. Fengtien provided the sharpest contrast of what provincial constitutionalism could do in different situations. Before 1922, while various factions were busy spreading the gospels of provincial constitutionalism, Fengtien suddenly became a zealous supporter of constitutional self-government. A general survey of the constitutional movements in these separate areas revealed two things. First, the whole movement was a hoax. Although it did not lack intellectual support, it was in the main adopted to meet temporary rather than long-term needs. The staunchest advocates of this movement, Hunan and Szechwan, showed no hesitation in encroaching upon the right of other provinces to self-government. The movement did not always remain defense-oriented. Despite the fact that its primary emphasis was on insulation from external interference, it was capable of acquiring an aggressive overtone. Second, the movement was the most convenient instrument employed by the ruling warlords to perpetuate their power. Without exception, the movement was sponsored by those ruling warlords who would remain in power after a constitutional government was installed, a government now sanctioned by the formality of an election. In the calculation of these warlords, provincial constitutionalism would not only protect them from outside pressure but would also enhance their claim to internal legitimacy.

The various other aspects of provincial constitutionalism and regionalism need not concern us here. Suffice it say that the net effect was that the minor groups failed to assume their responsibility in the regulatory process of the system and shifted the main burden to the major provinces, an obligation which eventually constituted a strain on the system.

Third Phase, 1924-28

The Chinese warlord system entered a new phase with the conclusion of the 1924 war—a war which drastically changed the picture of China. Chihli was defeated. It lost the presidency in November 1924, and it lost a big army. Most important, it lost a vast territory including Suiyüan, Jehol, Chahar, Chihli, Shantung, Honan, Anhwei, and Shensi. Although it still possessed Kiangsu, Kiangsi, Hupeh, Chekiang, and Fukien, the imprisonment of Ts'ao K'un and the near total defeat of Wu P'ei-fu left the provinces in a leaderless state. For quite some time, these provinces were to act without a single command organization, although they were still able to follow similar policies.

Rise of the Kuominchün

The Kuominchün was a new element. Feng Yü-hsiang and his coconspirators of the 1924 coup had all been Chihli generals. At the time of the coup, Feng had about 35,000 men and Sun Yo had about 5,000; the exact figures of Hu Ching-yi's force was not clear.⁵⁷ The Kuominchün occupied part of Chihli, Honan, Shensi, Kansu, Jehol, Suiyüan, and Chahar as a reward for its contribution to the war.

The lion's share of the spoils of the war, of course, went to Fengtien. It acquired a part of Chihli, including the military governorship of that province, as well as Shantung and Anhwei. The defeat of Chihli made Fengtien the strongest faction in the system, with an army of 200,000 men with the best equipment in the country.⁵⁸

The two victors got into trouble almost immediately after the war was ended. Despite the fact that Tientsin was taken by the Kuominchün, the Fengtien Army marched into that city, pressured the pro-Kuominchün military governor to resign, and disbanded his troops.⁵⁹ On November 24, 1924, another 10,000 Fengtien soldiers were sent to Peking to occupy that city jointly with the Kuominchün. On the same day, Feng Yü-hsiang announced his intention of resigning and taking a trip abroad, apparently because of the mounting pressure from Fengtien. His resignation was cordially refused by the regent government headed by Tuan Ch'i-jui, which had been formed after the war, and instead he went to Kalgan to assume his long-ignored office as the tupan of Northwestern Defense. There was no doubt that the Kuominchün was trying hard to avoid conflict with Fengtien. Its army was still small in comparison with the latter, but it had suddenly acquired a territory larger than it could manage. Therefore, the Kuominchün needed time, both to expand its army and to consolidate territory. For the next year, Feng was to content himself with developing the resources of the northwest and turning it into a powerful territorial base. It was during this period that his army swelled into a formidable force of over 100,000 strong.⁶⁰ It was also during this period that he first began to receive Soviet military aid and to have closer contact with the KMT in the south.⁶¹ Other Kuominchün units were busy expanding, too. Hu Ching-yi's force reached 250,000 men and Sun Yo's 30,000 men in a single year.⁶² The need to cope with the many problems arising from the expansion of forces and the management of a vast and unfamiliar territory made the Kuominchün reluctant to meet Fengtien in a confrontation.

On the other hand, Fengtien was occupied more or less with the same kinds of problems. It took time to establish itself in the newly acquired provinces. Besides, the provinces still under Chihli's control were stronger and richer than the Kuominchün territory at the beginning of 1925, and they were the logical target of Fengtien's second-phase expansion. In December 1924, the regent government issued an order to remove the Chihli military governor from Kiangsu. In early January 1925, Fengtien troops took possession of Nanking. This precipitated another war between Fengtien and Chihli. By the end of the month, the war was over, Chihli was defeated again, and Kiangsu was added to Fengtien's territorial domain. The end of the war was marked by a peace treaty in which both sides pledged to respect Shanghai's status as a demilitarized zone.⁶³ The struggle between Fengtien and Chihli, however, was far from being over. In June, Fengtien took advantage of the labor strike in Shanghai to move its troops into the city, thus violating the treaty.⁶⁴ In the next three months, Fengtien appointed three of its chief generals to be military governors; Chang Tsung-ch'ang to Shantung, Chiang Teng-hsuan to Anhwei, and Yang Yü-t'ing to Kiangsu. These three provinces lay on the main thoroughfare which connected the capital with the Yangtze Valley—the Tientsin-P'uk'uo Railway. From Chihli's viewpoint, this could not be interpreted in any other way except as a prelude to the implementation of further expansionist policy in the south.

On October 10, 1925, the Chihli warlord in Chekiang, Sun Ch'uan-fang, launched a surprise attack on the Fengtien force in Kiangsu. Fengtien was unwilling to fight at this time for several reasons. First, Chiang Teng-hsuan and Yang Yü-t'ing had been in office only recently and had not had time to lay a deep foundation of Fengtien power in their provinces. In case of war, it was possible that the internal situation of these provinces might become unstable and impede the military operations. Second, the supply line for Fengtien was too long to be manageable at this time. Fengtien had never fought a war so far away from its home base. Third, by this time the Kuominchün had already become much stronger and some unhappy incidents

had developed to mar its relationship with Fengtien. It was possible that the Kuominchün might foment trouble in the north while Fengtien was occupied in the south. In that case, Fengtien might be forced to tread the same path as Chihli and Anhwei did before—fight a two-front war. All these considerations advised Fengtien against meeting the Chihli challenge headlong. Therefore, in a matter of about two weeks all Fengtien troops in Kiangsu and Anhwei were evacuated to the border area of Shantung, while the former two provinces once again went to Chihli.

The trouble which Fengtien had expected from the Kuominchün was not slow in coming. Even as the Fengtien Army was on its way back north, the Kuominchün was moving eastward toward Chihli. A new crisis was approaching. But both sides appeared amenable to negotiation, and subsequently an agreement was reached whereby the Kuominchün was given back Pao-tung and the section of the Peking-Hank'ou Railway in Chihli which was lost to Fengtien not too long ago.⁶⁵ The agreement was honored and for a while it seemed that the crisis had subsided. Then suddenly, on November 23, 1925, came the news of the revolt of Kuo Sung-lin, a powerful Fengtien general. Evidence which later became available showed that Kuo had planned his revolt with Feng's full knowledge.⁶⁶ Therefore, Feng's willingness to talk peace with Fengtien was clearly a tactical move to baffle the latter. As soon as Kuo's army marched north to attack the Fengtien home base, the Kuominchün also marched east to attack other Fengtien units in Chihli. For the next two or three weeks, the war went well for Kuo, and the Kuominchün was also able to gain some ground in Chihli. Then the tide turned against Kuo and, in a matter of days at the end of the year, Kuo's force was totally annihilated and he was killed. The Kuominchün was left alone in the field. Possibly as a gesture to soften Fengtien's anger and to pave the road for peace, Feng again declared his readiness to retire from politics, although this time the pretext used was that he was facing problems of internal cohesion in the Kuominchün. Shortly afterwards, he went to the Soviet Union.

At about this time, another unexpected turn of events was taking place in a different quarter. During the time of the Chihli-Fengtien war in the autumn of 1925, Wu P'ei-fu was making plans to march north from Hupei to attack Fengtien's rear. In the early part of December, some Chihli units were actually sent to Shantung Province and attacked the Fengtien force in coordination with the Kuominchün. But Feng's conspiracy with Kuo Sung-lin angered Wu P'ei-fu more than Fengtien's hegemonic policy. Announcing that he would "teach the traitors a lesson," Wu suddenly decided to switch sides. A rapprochement was reached between Fengtien and Chihli in January 1926, by which they agreed to wage war jointly against the Kuominchün. From then on until the very end of the system (1928) the Kuominchün was almost continuously at war with either or both of these groups. The Kuominchün soldiers exhibited great skill and valor in face of relentless enemy attacks. With inferior manpower and equipment the Kuominchün withstood wave after wave of joint Fengtien-Chihli assaults at the pass of Nank'ou, and held that place for over three months (May-August 1926). The defense of Nank'ou was to have particular historical significance, for it was during this interval that the Northern Expedition of the KMT was launched.

KMT Emerges

Reference has been made with respect to the beginning of the party reorganization program and the military reform conducted by the KMT in 1924-25. The details of these programs need not concern us here, as volumes have been written about them. By the summer of 1926, the KMT leaders apparently felt that they were strong enough to make another effort to unify the nation. On June 6, 1926, in the midst of heavy warlord fighting in the north, the KMT formally appointed Chiang Kai-shek as the commander-in-chief of the Nationalist